# STANLEY BRERETON

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"THE TOWER OF LONDON."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# STANLEY BRERETON.

## MILDRED.

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# I.

## STANLEY REPEATS HIS OFFER.

That night, Stanley scarcely slept at all, and when he did sink into slumber, his dreams were of Mildred.

Once more she had completely fascinated him, and he felt that his future happiness entirely rested with her.

Everything now seemed secure. But not till they were bound together by holy ties, should he be without anxiety.

Did no thought of Rose intrude itself? It did—but he dismissed it as quickly as possible, and endeavoured to persuade himself that she would soon forget him. At all events, he would not allow himself to dwell upon her image, but in spite of his determination it appeared before him, and

seemed to warn him that he was advancing on a course that would end in unhappiness.

These thoughts occurred to him as he walked through the Green Park towards the Grosvenor, and he more than once stood still to reflect. But he blamed himself for his indecision, and murmured, "I have made a choice, and must adhere to it, come what may! But I believe it is for the best."

He could not, however, divest himself of a certain feeling of uneasiness, as he entered the Grosvenor, and was shown into a large and handsome room, where he found Lady Talmash and Mildred seated beside a small table.

The captivating smile with which the latter received him dissipated his fears, and he was once more bound hand and foot by the fair enslaver, whose charms were enhanced by an exceedingly pretty morning costume.

Lady Talmash seemed in a very lively mood, and was likewise most becomingly attired.

In reply to his inquiries Stanley was told that the squire had just gone out, but would return presently.

After a little pleasant chat about the occurrences of the day before, Lady Talmash rose and said, with a smile:

"I'll now leave you for a short time. I dare say you have something to say to each other."

Smiling upon them both in the sweetest manner possible, she then quitted the room —kissing her hand as she passed through the door.

The moment she had disappeared Stanley flung himself at Mildred's feet, and, taking her hand—which she did not attempt to withdraw—pressed it to his lips.

Fixing a passionate look upon her, he once more declared his love, and besought her to make him happy.

"Rise, dearest boy," she cried. "Someone may come into the room, and then you will look ridiculous."

"No, I will not quit this posture," he rejoined, still more passionately, "till you grant my prayer."

"But I *have* accepted you," she rejoined, smiling. "How often do you require the assurance?"

"Once more only," he replied, still retaining her hand—still gazing up at her lovely

countenance. "Let me hear those tender words pronounced. Say you love me!—say you will wed me!"

"You are very exacting," she replied, with a gratified smile. "But I will grant your request. Hear me, then, dear boy, I do love you, and will marry you, provided papa will give his consent."

"He will—he does," cried a loud cheery voice, which could proceed from no one else but the squire.

Stanley instantly sprang to his feet, and looking round saw that the worthy personage had entered the room at this critical moment.

"This is too bad, papa," cried Mildred, rising.

But she did not look displeased nor even surprised by the interruption, and Stanley, taking her hand, led her towards her father, who had stopped.

When within a short distance of the squire, he bowed to him respectfully and said:

"Mr. Warburton, I am about to solicit the greatest boon you can bestow upon me—your daughter's hand. I love her

deeply as you are aware, and will endeavour to make her happy!"

"I have no doubt you will make her a good husband," replied the squire. "Take her, and may every blessing attend you both! May your union be happy!"

After tenderly embracing his daughter, and brushing the tears from his eyes, he shook hands cordially with Stanley.

The party was now joined by Lady Talmash, who felt that the moment for her appearance on the scene had arrived.

Flying towards Mildred she embraced her most affectionately.

"I sincerely congratulate you both," she cried. "You are formed for each other, and your union is sure to be happy. My wishes are now realised, dear Mr. Warburton," she added, shaking hands with him.

"I think I had better retire," said the squire, almost overcome by emotion.

"No, no, dear papa," cried Mildred. "We cannot part with you just now. Sit down on the sofa—pray sit down."

"And I'll set down beside you, sir, if you'll allow me," said Lady Talmash.

"And we'll sit opposite," added Stan-

ley, bringing chairs for Mildred and himself.

In a very short time the squire quite recovered, and looking from one to the other with still glistening eyes, and speaking in rather tremulous tones, said:

"I thought I was prepared for this moment, but I find I'm not. I have a good deal to say, but I can't say it now."

"Don't be uneasy, dearest papa," said Mildred, taking his hand, and pressing it to her lips, "you are not going to lose me. I shall always be near you—always ready to come to you."

"It is my sincere wish, sir," said Stanley, very earnestly, "that when Mildred becomes my wife, she should be as much your daughter as ever."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the squire with a choking utterance. "Quite impossible! I don't expect it—don't even desire it. But let this be clearly understood—my house will always be your house—and your wife will be as much mistress of it as ever. Come when you will, and stay as long as you please. Your rooms will always be ready for you. My horses and carriages,

and all belonging to them, will be at your disposal."

"Oh! you are too good, dearest papa," exclaimed Mildred.

"Not a bit, my dear child—not a bit!" he said, tenderly pressing her hand. "I have only lived for you, and all I desire is to see you happy."

"Do you wish me to keep up Brereton, sir," asked Stanley.

"Certainly," replied the squire. "You must have a house, and can't have a better. Besides, you *must* keep it up for your mother."

"Exactly my feeling, sir," replied Stanley; "but I desired to ascertain your wishes."

"Moreover, Brereton has the great recommendation of being near you, dearest papa," said Mildred.

"An easy ride, at any rate," said the squire, smiling.

"I have not yet had an opportunity of saying anything," interposed Lady Talmash; "but I have listened with the greatest pleasure to all that has been said. I think Mr. Warburton's proposition the

kindest and best that could be made, and one that cannot fail to be conducive to the happiness of his daughter and her husband."

"I'm quite sure of it," exclaimed Stanley.

"So am I," exclaimed Mildred, again kissing her father's hand.

"But your ladyship must be included in the arrangement, or it will not be complete," said the squire. "We all owe much to you, who have most materially assisted in bringing about this match. Therefore, if you take any interest in the work of your own hands, you must come frequently and see how it prospers."

"Promise that?" cried Mildred.

"You will ever be welcome," added Stanley.

"I don't doubt it," said Lady Talmash, "therefore I *will* come, and make a long stay."

"The longer the better," said the squire. "Now Stanley," he added, "I should recommend you to make all necessary communications to your mother, without delay."

"It is my intention to do so, sir," he replied.

"I don't feel quite certain that what

you have to tell her will be altogether agreeable," said Mildred, "as I am by no means certain that I am such a favourite as I used to be. But never mind. The truth must be told."

"The truth will enchant her," said Stanley. "Don't think otherwise."

"And Lady Starkey and her niece must be duly informed," added Mildred.

"They shall," said Stanley.

"You will see Sir John Lambert at dinner," said the squire. "I have just asked him."

"I am glad of it," replied Stanley, taking leave.

Mildred went with him to the door, where we fancy a tender salute was given and received, but the squire and Lady Talmash saw nothing.

## II.

### WHAT PASSED BETWEEN STANLEY AND HIS MOTHER.

STANLEY shrank from the disagreeable duty he had to perform, but it could not be avoided.

He felt he should be blamed both by his mother and Lady Starkey for the step he had taken, but this was nothing in comparison with the pain which his conduct might possibly inflict upon Rose. He had proceeded too far to retire thus suddenly, and knew not what excuse to offer.

On arriving at the house in Berkeley-square, he learnt from old Minshull, who opened the door, that his mother was within, but that Lady Starkey and her niece had driven out in the brougham.

"I rather fancy they have received some bad news this morning from Sir John Lambert," said Minshull, "for they have been in low spirits ever since he was here."

Stanley took no notice of the remark, but desired to be shown to his mother. He found her in the boudoir, and thought she did not receive him with her usual affectionate warmth.

"Has anything happened?" he inquired. "Minshull has just told me that Lady Starkey and Rose looked much depressed, and you don't seem in particularly good spirits."

"I'll tell you why, Stanley," she repeated very gravely. "You yourself are the cause of our trouble. We have just seen Sir John Lambert, who says you are about to propose to Mildred Warburton. Have you done so?"

"I have proposed, mother, and have been accepted," he replied. "I have come to give you the news."

"I am sorry to hear it," she replied, with something like a groan. "You have made a great mistake."

"How so, mother?" he cried. "I ought to esteem myself singularly fortunate—and most persons will think me so. There are hundreds of young men who would contend with me for Mildred's hand. Bear in mind she is a great heiress, and a great beauty."

"And likewise a great flirt," replied Mrs. Brereton, sharply. "She will make you wretched. How has she behaved to you of late, eh?"

"Never mind! She has satisfactorily explained her conduct."

"Impossible!" cried Mrs. Brereton. "You have succumbed to her fascinations —that is the long and short of it."

"No more of this, mother, if you love me. I tell you Mildred has accepted me."

"And I repeat I am very sorry for it. You might have had a very charming girl, who really loves you, and would have made you happy, and your choice would have pleased both myself and Lady Starkey; but you have given her up for this coquette who has made you her dupe, and is laughing at you in her sleeve."

"Mother, I cannot allow even *you* to

speak of Mildred in such terms," cried Stanley, angrily.

But she heeded him not.

"No wonder I am hurt and disappointed," she continued. "You have thrown away a life of real conjugal happiness, for one of constant, jealous torture."

"Mother! pray, dear mother!" he cried, vainly trying to stop her.

"You have acted like a fool, I tell you. Ere long you will deeply repent what you have done, and then you will call to mind my words."

"Since you persist in this violent language, mother, I must take my leave," he said. "On calm reflection you will see you have gone a great deal too far. Tell Lady Starkey and Rose that I have been here, and deeply regret not to have seen them."

"You will not be disappointed," said his mother, as the door opened, and the two persons he had mentioned came in.

Now there was no escape, and he must bear the worst.

Lady Starkey appeared almost as much

displeased with him as did his mother; but though Rose looked sad she did not seem resentful.

Stanley was greatly touched by her evident affection.

"So you have committed yourself, I suppose?" cried Lady Starkey. "The coquette has gained her point."

"If your ladyship means that Miss Warburton has accepted me, it is perfectly true," replied Stanley.

On hearing this distinct avowal, Lady Starkey regarded him with scorn, while Rose gave him a look that cut him to the heart.

His anguish was perceptible to all, and caused a slight reaction in his favour.

"Leave us for a few moments, dearest aunt," whispered Rose to Lady Starkey, "and take Mrs. Brereton with you."

Her ladyship complied without a word of remonstrance.

"Stanley," said Rose, as soon as they were alone, "dear Stanley, for I will call you so, as this will be our last interview, I will not reproach you for the cruel deceit you have practised upon me."

"It was no deceit—I swear it," he cried passionately.

"Add not perjury to wrong," she said, "or you will make me hate you. You have given me greater pain by your thoughtlessness—for I will use no harsher term—than I ever yet endured. But I forgive you, and it was to tell you so that I have detained you."

"Thank you for that word," he cried, in a voice half suffocated by emotion. "Oh! thank you!"

"May you be happy!" she murmured, regarding him with tender anxiety. "I do not think you will—but you shall have my prayers."

As she uttered the last words her strength completely failed her, and she would have fallen had not Stanley caught her in his arms.

Greatly alarmed, he bore her to a couch —but before he could place her upon it she had become insensible.

He was rushing out of the room to summon assistance, when Lady Starkey and his mother entered, and instantly perceiving what had occurred, the former flew towards

the sofa, while Mrs. Brereton hurried off for some restoratives.

Stanley did not quit the room, but as he regarded the fainting girl, he bitterly reproached himself, and his resolution was almost shaken.

## III.

### MILDRED'S MARRIED LIFE.

More than a year has passed, and a great deal has occurred during the interval.

The first and most important event we have to record is Stanley's marriage with the lovely Mildred Warburton, which took place as soon as all necessary legal and other arrangements could be made, at Chester Cathedral, in compliance with the squire's wishes, he having always declared that he should like his daughter to be married in the same reverend pile as her mother and grandmother had been.

The wedding was almost private. Neither Mrs. Brereton nor Lady Starkey were present at the ceremony; the former, who had

not quitted town, pleading illness, in excuse for non-attendance, and the latter coldly declining the invitation sent her.

The absence of two persons so dear to him, was a great trouble to Stanley, but did not appear to give his bride, or her father, much concern.

The honeymoon was spent by the happy pair on the Continent, chiefly in Switzerland. They were accompanied by Lady Talmash, who proved an invaluable friend; since, by her judicious care and management, she prevented any disagreement from occurring between them.

Of course, it was quite impossible to prevent the lovely young bride from being pleased by the expressions of admiration with which her appearance was everywhere greeted, but Lady Talmash contrived to keep all objectionable persons at a distance.

Relying on her ladyship's remarkable tact and discretion, Stanley felt quite easy in regard to his beautiful wife, and was amused rather than annoyed at the sensation she excited. He was vain enough to think that in point of good looks he was inferior to none of her numerous admirers—and such, indeed, was the fact.

Meantime, his passionate attachment to her increased, and was fully requited, for she loved him then with an ardour quite equal to his own.

On their return from the wedding trip, they went to Beaucliffe; the restorations at Brereton Hall, not being sufficiently advanced to allow them to take up their abode there with any degree of comfort.

But they really lost nothing by this step, for the worthy squire did everything in his power to make them happy, and quite succeeded in his efforts. It would have been strange indeed, if he had not, for he let them have entirely their own way.

Since she was sixteen, Mildred had been mistress of the house, and her marriage had heightened her influence rather than diminished it.

Lady Talmash was still with them, and likely to remain; her importance to the general comfort being fully recognised and appreciated.

Mrs. Brereton delayed her return till the restorations of the old house should be completed, Lady Starkey having most kindly and considerately extended her invitation to that time.

We must mention that poor Rose had not, as yet, recovered from the shock she had received. She had been seriously ill, but was now slowly improving under the tender care of her aunt.

The squire kept as much company as formerly, but was more careful in the selection of his guests, or rather, he always consulted Mildred and Lady Talmash about them.

Stanley never interfered in the arrangements, and sometimes did not even know who was invited. When he wanted information, he generally applied to Glossop, the butler.

Old Minshull had been sent to Brereton Hall to superintend the workmen, and carefully attended to his master's instructions. Stanley's great fear was that after all had been done Mildred would not like the place as well as Beaucliffe.

His apprehensions were shared by Lady Talmash—her ladyship having heard many remarks on the subject from Mildred, who secretly dreaded the anticipated change of abode.

The young mistress of Brereton took little interest in the alterations of the ancient

mansion. When she visited the place she spent most of the time in the garden, which had now been completely put in order, and really looked most charming.

However, she did one thing; she ordered new stables to be built on the model of those at Beaucliffe. But she could not be induced to give any directions as to the interior of the house. When Stanley spoke to her on the subject, she always replied laughingly:

"Oh! do just what you please, dearest boy. I'm sure to like it."

Her husband did not feel quite certain as to that, but hoped she might.

And now we must ask rather a serious question. Had Stanley, since his marriage, ever thought of Rose? We must answer in the affirmative. He reproached himself for his conduct towards her, but endeavoured, though vainly, to banish her image from his mind. His mother, in her letters, never alluded to the forsaken girl; but he learnt from Minshull that she had been dangerously ill. He could only attribute her illness to one cause; and the questions, put by him to the old servant, confirmed the opinion.

"I should say, sir," observed Minshull. "that Miss Rose has been suffering from disease of the heart. At one time both Lady Starkey and your mother quite despaired of her. Heaven be praised! she's better now."

Stanley echoed the prayer. Had she died, his breast would have always been torn by remorse.

Fortunately, he was spared this infliction. But he could not forgive himself for the suffering he had caused her; though he recalled, with some satisfaction, her declaration that she forgave him.

At length, the restoration of Brereton Hall was complete. But Mildred showed no anxiety to quit her father's house, nor did he seem inclined to part with her, but told Stanley they must remain with him a few months longer.

As he could not very well do otherwise, the master of Brereton assented—though rather reluctantly.

Completely renovated and re-furnished—so far as was needful—and with excellent taste, the old hall really looked beautiful. But beautiful as it was, it did not attract Mildred, and it was entirely owing to her

persuasions that her father told his son-in-law that he could not part with them.

By this time, Mrs. Brereton, the elder, had returned to her abode, and was delighted with the improvements made in it. Nor did she object to arrangements that left her as much mistress of the mansion as before. She provided herself with an establishment, which, though not large, quite sufficed for her wants, and obviated the necessity of further expense in this particular for the present.

## IV.

### DARCY RECEIVES AN INVITATION TO BEAUCLIFFE.

Now that his mother had returned, Stanley generally spent a portion of each day at Brereton, replenishing the empty shelves of the library with old books, which he had bought—contemplating the family portraits, writing letters, or pacing to and fro in the gallery, and looking into almost every chamber.

Though he made no sort of complaint, his mother did not think he looked happy; and at length, though not without misgiving, ventured to question him on the subject.

They were sitting together in the great

banqueting-hall, where no dinner had been given since its restoration, but which really looked magnificent with its old hangings and furniture. They were sitting, we say, near the large bay-window, when Stanley, who had not been very communicative that morning, lapsed into a gloomy silence.

"You don't seem in very good spirits to-day, Stanley," said his mother. "Has anything happened?"

As he took no notice of the question, she repeated it, and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Nothing has happened more than usual," he replied.

"I am afraid you are not happy, my dear boy," she said, regarding him anxiously.

"What makes you think so?" he cried, sharply.

"Your looks. Ever since my return I have noticed a change in the once joyous expression of your countenance. I have said nothing to you about it, because I feared to displease you. But this morning you look so unhappy that I cannot hold my tongue. If you have any trouble, you may safely confide it to me."

"I have no real trouble, dearest mother,

he rejoined. "But I own I am disappointed that my wife won't come and live here. This morning I remonstrated with her on the subject, and she told me, in plain terms, that she dislikes the house. Naturally, I was provoked."

"It certainly is unaccountable that she should have such an aversion to the place," rejoined Mrs. Brereton. "But after all, it doesn't much signify, for you have another house quite as good—if not better. So you must endeavour to reconcile yourself to the deprivation. I was afraid some misunderstanding had taken place between you and your wife; and if such had been the case, I should have been really grieved."

"Then give yourself no uneasiness, dear mother. Mildred and I have not yet had our first quarrel, and mean to avoid it. Lady Talmash keeps all straight between us. As to my excellent father-in-law, he is really the very best fellow on earth, and I believe would do anything to please me, except part with his daughter."

"Why he *has* parted with her—he *has* given her to you, my dear boy," exclaimed his mother, laughing. "What more would you have?"

"I want to have her all to myself. I want her to live here, at Brereton."

"The present arrangement is much the best, if you could only think so. Your wife has such an indulgent father that she cannot leave him. Nor is it necessary or desirable that she should. You, yourself, would be of his opinion if you could only view the matter calmly. Your wife, I suppose, does not object to your spending part of the day here?"

"On the contrary, she urges me to do so," he replied.

"Very well, then, what more do you want? The good, generous squire takes care you are put to no expense. Few fathers-in-law would behave so liberally."

"I grant it all," rejoined Stanley. "Nevertheless, I should very much prefer to live here with my wife."

"Get rid of that notion as soon as you can," cried his mother, rather impatiently. "You cannot possibly be better off than you now are. Most young men would envy you. Besides, your lovely wife is safer at Beaucliffe than here."

"How so, mother? Do you mean to insinuate that I couldn't take care of her?"

"No such thing. But the fact that she is with her father ought to relieve you of all anxiety concerning her."

"Her father is not particularly vigilant," cried Stanley.

"More vigilant than you imagine. She is in no danger with him. I advise you to let things remain as they are."

"I won't make any promise, lest I shouldn't be able to keep it."

After a brief silence, he again looked at his mother, and said:

"Why didn't you inform me of poor Rose's illness?"

"Because Lady Starkey desired me not. What need was there to write to you about it? You had ceased to care for her."

"Not so. I felt—and still feel—the deepest interest in her; and am rejoiced to learn that she is now out of danger."

"Stanley," said his mother, gravely, "you must think no more of Rose. She has quite conquered her love for you. At one time we thought her heart was broken."

"Her heart broken, mother?"

"Ay, broken. But Lady Starkey suc-

ceeded in convincing her that her affections were misplaced, and saved her."

Stanley could not repress a groan.

"Let us dismiss this subject," said his mother. "And I beg you won't mention poor dear Rose's name to me again."

"Fear it not," he replied, in a tone of anguish. "But I must tell you how deeply I have reproached myself for the suffering I have caused her."

"I don't wonder at it," she rejoined. "And now no more."

They were still sitting together, talking of other matters, when the noise of horses' feet was heard in front of the hall.

Stanley jumped up, and, hastening to the window that looked out upon the entrance, beheld his wife, accompanied by her father and Lady Talmash, and attended by a couple of grooms.

Mildred, who never looked better than in her riding-dress, was mounted upon her famous hunter, and seemed in excellent spirits. She was talking and laughing joyously.

Surprised that they did not dismount, Stanley went to speak to them. As he

passed through the entrance hall he met Minshull, who told him they were not coming in, but wished to see him.

"What the deuce is the matter?" thought Stanley, quickening his steps.

"Stanley, dear boy," cried Mildred, as he made his appearance; we've only just called to tell you we are riding to Bostock Hall. We don't want you to go with us—unless you like."

"Come along!" cried the squire. "A ride this fine morning will do you good."

"Yes, I strongly recommend it," added Lady Talmash.

"I'll follow," replied Stanley. "I've got something to do here that I want to finish."

"Poh! That's a mere idle excuse," cried his wife. "But do just as you please."

By this time Mrs. Brereton had come out, and begged them to stay, if only for five minutes.

"Can't get off my horse, thank you, ma'am!" cried Mildred.

"Do, my dear, just to oblige me," urged Mrs. Brereton. "There are several things I want to show you."

"I'll see them another time—not now," replied Mildred. "Come along, papa."

And kissing the tips of her fingers to Mrs. Brereton, she rode off, attended by the others.

"There goes an affectionate daughter-in-law," observed Stanley to his mother. "I hope you are pleased with her."

"Very much," replied Mrs. Brereton. "I thought she looked quite beautiful, and as you married her for her beauty you ought to be equally well pleased."

"I said I would follow them, but I doubt if I shall," observed Stanley.

"That doesn't look as if you cared for her society," said his mother. "Keep your promise."

Stanley made no reply, but went into the house.

The party, who had just left Brereton Hall, had not ridden more than a couple of miles, when they saw a gentleman on horseback coming towards them.

Even at a distance, Mildred fancied she recognised him, but as he drew nearer she felt quite sure it was Captain Darcy, and said so to the others.

Darcy, for he it was, knew them as soon as they knew him, and riding forward, took off his hat, and expressed the great pleasure it afforded him to meet them.

"I have been staying for a few days in this neighbourhood, Mr. Warburton," he said, "and was on my way to call on you."

"Sorry I shan't be at home to receive you, captain," said the squire. "But will you come and stay a day or two with me at Beaucliffe?" Then, without waiting for an answer, he added, "Come to dinner, come to-morrow, if it suits you."

"I shall be enchanted to accept the invitation," replied Darcy, "if Mrs. Stanley Brereton approves of it."

"Oh, I should be happy to see you," rejoined Mildred. "Besides, I never interfere with papa's arrangements, nor does my husband, though we are staying with him."

"Then I'll come with the greatest pleasure," replied Darcy.

Fancying Lady Talmash looked rather grave, he now addressed himself to her, but did not succeed in winning a smile.

"Where are you staying, captain?" asked the squire.

"At Bostock," he replied.

"How odd!" exclaimed Mildred. "Why, we are now going there."

"Then since it is needless to call at Beaucliffe in your absence, I will ride back with you," said Darcy.

And as he joined the party, he contrived to place himself near Mildred.

"I see you have got my old horse," he said. "I hope you like him as well as ever?"

"Better than ever," she rejoined, smiling.

"That's satisfactory," he cried. "You see, I have ventured into your neighbourhood," he added, lowering his tone, "though I was almost afraid to do so. And now to my great surprise and delight I have got an invitation to come and stay with you. I hope I didn't do wrong in accepting it, but I really couldn't resist."

"Make yourself quite easy. Papa will be very glad to see you."

"But what about your husband?"

"I can't exactly answer for him. But I don't think he will mind your coming."

"Well, I will do my best to please him."

"In that case it is not improbable you may succeed."

While this conversation was passing, Lady Talmash observed to the squire:

"I'm sorry you have invited Captain Darcy. He's the very last man you ought to have asked."

"I didn't think of it at the moment," replied the squire. "Perhaps Stanley mayn't like it."

"I'm sure he won't," said Lady Talmash. "Shall I put the captain off?"

"No, no, Mildred wouldn't be pleased with that. Let us hope all may turn out right."

## V.

### A COOLNESS BETWEEN STANLEY AND HIS WIFE.

STANLEY did not follow the party to Bostock, and they said nothing to him on their return about the invitation given to Captain Darcy, the squire having specially enjoined silence on the subject.

"Darcy is my guest," he said, "and if a mistake has been made, I alone am responsible."

In truth, he was rather afraid that Stanley would be displeased, though he didn't care to confess it.

Little dreaming what was in store for him, Stanley spent the greater part of the next day at Brereton. His wife had told him that some one, whom he knew, was

coming to dinner, and would probably remain for a few days. But she didn't say who it was. Nor did anybody else. So he went away in complete ignorance.

No presentiment of ill could have troubled him, for his mother remarked that he looked much more cheerful than he had done of late.

"Have you any company at Beaucliffe to-day?" she asked.

"Yes, a small dinner party, the Leghs and the Isherwoods, and another person whose name I don't know, but who is going to stay two or three days at the house. Now, that's a thing I don't like. When I know the people it's all very well, but I can't bear to meet strangers."

"Mr. Warburton's friends are all nice people," said the mother.

"Not at all," he replied. "There are some I wouldn't meet if I could help it."

"You have grown so very particular."

"I am particular about my wife—not about myself. I don't like to meet certain persons."

"Pooh! pooh!—don't make yourself uneasy."

"I try not to do so—but I can't conquer the feeling. I believe I must be jealous."

"I really believe you are," replied his mother, laughing. "But since you would marry such a lovely creature, you must pay the penalty of your imprudence. Mildred cannot fail to be admired."

"She likes admiration too much," cried Stanley.

"You were always aware of that, my dear boy. It's too late to complain now."

On his return to Beaucliffe, late in the afternoon, Stanley overtook a gentleman, who had a military air, and was followed by a groom, the latter being provided with saddle-bags, and carrying a valise. Evidently, this must be the unknown guest.

What was Stanley's astonishment and annoyance, when he discovered that the supposed stranger was no other than Captain Darcy.

On seeing him, Darcy bowed very courteously, and held out his hand, which Stanley felt bound to take.

"You look as if you didn't expect me, Mr. Brereton," said the captain, smiling. "Perhaps Mr. Warburton may not have men-

tioned that he invited me yesterday to dine with him and spend a few days at Beaucliffe."

"He certainly did not," replied Stanley, controlling himself with difficulty.

"Ah! That quite explains your surprise," cried Darcy. "However, such is the fact, and I need scarcely say I had the greatest pleasure in accepting an invitation so agreeable in every way. Though rather late in the day, I hope I may be allowed to congratulate you on your marriage with Miss Warburton. As you are aware, I once aspired to her hand myself, but met with the fate I deserved."

In spite of his dislike of Darcy, there was somthing in the captain's manner that favourably impressed Stanley. Perceiving this, the other went on in the same strain.

"I trust we may become great friends, Mr. Brereton," he said. "Naturally, I was very much provoked at losing such a great prize as you have won. But reflection soon convinced me that you are the right man, and reconciled me to my fate."

Stanley could not avoid laughing at this apparently frank avowal, and Darcy saw that his point was gained.

"Now that I have given you this explanation, Mr. Brereton," he said, "I trust you will dismiss any feeling you may have against me."

"It is already gone," replied Stanley, beginning to think him a good fellow.

Shortly afterwards, he looked round, and exclaimed:

"Here comes Mr. Warburton, with my wife and Lady Talmash."

"So I see," replied Darcy.

When the parties met, the squire was greatly relieved to find his son-in-law and his guest already on such good terms.

"Why didn't you tell me Captain Darcy was coming?" said Stanley to his wife, in a tone of good-natured reproach.

"I'm to blame!" cried the squire.

"I kept it for you as an agreeable surprise," said Mildred. "I was certain you would be delighted to see him."

"So I am," replied Stanley, shaking hands with him again, and more heartily than before.

By this unexpected meeting all the squire's misgivings were put to flight, and Mildred was secretly pleased.

But clear-sighted Lady Talmash, whose

suspicions had been aroused by Darcy's manner, became more uneasy than ever.

Darcy was really charmed with the house, which far surpassed his expectations, and told Stanley again he was the luckiest man of his acquaintance. Stanley made a suitable reply, but didn't seem quite sensible of his extraordinary good luck.

The party invited to dinner was small, consisting of Mr. Legh, the Rector of Birch, and his wife, with Mr. and Mrs. Isherwood, the lady being very handsome and attractive.

Darcy sat next to the young mistress of the house, but did not devote himself exclusively to her, but talked a good deal to the captivating Mrs. Isherwood, who sat on his other side, and seemed much pleased with him.

In a word, he made himself generally agreeable, and pleased everybody except Lady Talmash, who occupied her usual place on the right of Mr. Warburton. On the squire's left was Mrs. Legh, and next to her sat Stanley.

Darcy, who occasionally cast a look at him, thought him rather dull. He cer-

tainly was not very lively, but this might be attributed to his abstinence from wine.

"Would you believe it, Captain Darcy," remarked Mildred; "my husband has become a teetotaller."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Darcy. "You surprise me."

"Quite true, I assure you."

"Hum!" exclaimed Darcy, noticing that Stanley overheard the discourse. "I wish I could say as much. But I confess I am rather fond of a glass of good wine—especially champagne."

"Wine is excellent in moderation," remarked the jovial Rector of Birch, who sat on the other side of Mildred, and was very partial to her father's old port. "Tell your husband I said so."

"I will," she replied, laughing.

"If he wants any proof that good wine is beneficial," added the rector, "he has only to look at his father-in-law, who is the picture of good health."

"I never saw a man in finer condition," said Darcy.

At this moment the butler appeared with champagne.

"I certainly shan't refuse it," said Darcy, laughing.

"Nor I," added the rector.

After dinner a bottle of the famous old port was introduced and finished by Mr. Legh and the squire—Darcy and Mr. Isherwood contenting themselves with a few glasses of exquisite Laffitte—and Stanley drinking nothing.

The conversation turned on the political questions of the day, and was almost entirely conducted by the squire and the rector, both of whom were staunch Conservatives—perhaps we ought to call them good old Tories.

Though he found it somewhat difficult to put in a word, Darcy expressed a decided approval of their opinions, and in consequence rose in his host's estimation.

One of the squire's axioms was that a rubber at whist should always follow a bottle of port.

So he made up one for himself and the rector, while his lovely daughter enchanted the rest of the party by her brilliant performance on the pianoforte. Darcy stood by her side all the time, and Stanley talked

quietly, and in a low tone, to Lady Talmash.

On their departure, the visitors declared they had passed a most delightful evening.

"Your dinners are always capital, Mr. Warburton," said the rector, as he shook hands with the squire at parting, "and that old port is magnificent."

As he had good reason, Darcy was extremely well-satisfied with his reception. His great aim was not to arouse Stanley's jealousy, and so far he thought he had succeeded. He could not, of course, tell what Lady Talmash was saying to him, but he concluded it was not very favourable to himself. Still he was not much afraid of her, now that he had obtained admittance to the house.

On carefully watching the behaviour of the young pair to each other, the shrewd observer came to the conclusion that a slight quarrel had taken place between them, though whether it arose from jealousy on the husband's part, or from some other cause, he could not determine. The squire did not seem aware of it, but it

was clear that Lady Talmash was in the secret.

Next morning, when they all met at breakfast, he felt convinced that his suspicions were correct.

A coolness had occurred between Stanley and his wife, though they took the greatest pains to conceal it from the squire.

What was the cause of the quarrel, Darcy, of course, could not even conjecture, but he was exceedingly glad that it had occurred before his arrival.

After breakfast, as they all passed out through the open French windows to the lawn, Stanley said to the visitor:

"You must excuse my leaving you, Captain Darcy. Mr. Warburton and the ladies will take every care of you. I generally pass part of the day at Brereton, where I have still some things to arrange. I shall be very glad to show you the house, if you like to ride over."

Before making any direct reply, Darcy consulted Mildred by a look; but the squire answered for her.

"Oh! yes," he said. "We'll bring him over."

"Come to luncheon," said Stanley, addressing Darcy; "though you won't do half so well there as you would here."

"Anything will do for me," replied Darcy.

"I'll send on a basket of provisions," said the squire, "and put a bottle or two of champagne in it," he added, laughing.

As Stanley marched off, Darcy noticed that he did not take leave of his wife, or even look at her.

There was a great deal to be seen, as we know, at Beaucliffe, and Darcy passed a very agreeable morning in visiting the stables, and looking over the garden in company with the squire and the two ladies. He made himself so amusing, that even Lady Talmash was pleased with him; though she did not leave him for a single moment alone with Mildred.

When these inspections were over, they played a game at lawn-tennis on the smooth grass-plot, and then got ready for Brereton.

Mildred drove Lady Talmash in her pretty little phaeton, and the two gentlemen accompanied them on horseback.

When Stanley told his mother that Captain Darcy was coming to luncheon, she

thought he must be jesting, but when she found he was in earnest, she could not repress her displeasure.

"I couldn't have believed it unless you yourself had told me," she exclaimed. "How could you be so foolish? But you'll repent your folly—that's certain."

"Mr. Warburton wished him to see the house," said Stanley, in a deprecatory tone. "And so did my wife."

"Your wife! I dare say," she cried, in increasing astonishment and displeasure.

"Yes, they are all coming. We must prepare for them."

"Give your own orders, then," said his mother. "I will have nothing to do with it."

But with a little persuasion she yielded, and consented to prepare for luncheon.

"But we have nothing in the house," she said; "nothing, I mean, good enough for the squire."

"Oh, he'll see to that himself," said Stanley. "He means to send a basket of good things with some bottles of champagne."

About two o'clock the party arrived at Brereton.

They had halted about a quarter of a mile off to look at the old hall, and Darcy thought it a most picturesque structure.

"Be sure to tell Stanley so, if you want to please him," said Mildred.

"You like it, don't you?" said Darcy to her.

"Not much," she replied. "But then I'm not fond of that kind of house."

"I'm afraid you're rather wanting in taste," said the captain.

On reaching the house they found Stanley at the door ready to receive them, and Darcy again expressed his admiration of the place in most rapturous terms.

"Never beheld anything like it!" he exclaimed. "Never, by Jove!"

"Well, come in and see what it's like inside," said Stanley, giving his arm to Lady Talmash.

Darcy followed with Mildred, and as he stood still in the entrance hall to look at the noble staircase, his raptures increased. The same thing occurred wherever he went.

By this time Mrs. Brereton had regained her usual serenity, and expressed the greatest delight at seeing the squire and the ladies.

But she could not make up her mind to shake hands with Darcy, although he bowed to her very ceremoniously.

Luncheon was served in the great banqueting-hall, but no attempt whatever was made at display.

This was the first time Mildred had partaken of a meal in the house, and Mrs. Brereton could not help alluding to the fact.

"Yes, I believe it is," replied the young lady, laughing.

"But not the last," observed the squire. "Ere long she will breakfast, luncheon, and dine here every day."

Stanley looked as if he scarcely expected it.

Assisted by a servant, who had been sent over from Beaucliffe with the basket of good things, old Minshull did wonders, and gave the squire great satisfaction. He was particularly brisk in dispensing the champagne. The luncheon, which was very much enjoyed, occupied more than half an hour.

After a hasty inspection of the interior of the house, which seemed new to Mildred,

and elicited the highest praise from Darcy, the party went out.

"Whatever may be his faults," thought Mrs. Brereton, "the captain is a good judge of old houses."

## VI.

### LADY TALMASH CAUTIONS DARCY.

STANLEY and Lady Talmash lingered in the garden, while the others went to examine the new stables.

"I want to have a little talk with you, Stanley," said her ladyship. "We must get rid of that man."

"Darcy?"

"Yes, Darcy. Who else could I mean? He's dangerous—highly dangerous."

"I really don't think so," replied Stanley.

"Then you must be blind," cried her ladyship, in surprise. "I have watched him most carefully, and am certain I have formed a correct opinion of him. If you don't want to lose your wife get rid of him without delay."

"You judge him too severely, I repeat," said Stanley. "It is his habit to assume an air of gallantry."

"Don't be deceived," replied Lady Talmash. He is enamoured of your wife, and is only waiting an opportunity to breathe his passion into her ears, and to speak truth, she seems inclined to listen to him. You ought to perceive this as plainly as I do."

"If I thought so!" cried Stanley, almost fiercely.

"Keep calm! don't make a scene or you'll fail. You ought never to have allowed him to enter the house. But since he has obtained admittance be careful how you get rid of him. He has already won the squire's good opinion."

"Yes, I'm quite aware of that," remarked Stanley. "But supposing your suspicions are correct, which I can scarcely believe, what do you advise me to do?"

"We must consider," replied Lady Talmash; "and it is to talk the matter over that I have brought you here. Unluckily, you cannot speak to your wife, or put her upon her guard. She would deeply resent any interference on your part, and attribute

it to a wrong motive. You cannot warn the squire—because he would merely laugh at you."

"What then can I do?" cried Stanley. "Shall I act on my own responsibility?"

"I will tell you what I propose," replied Lady Talmash. "I will speak to Captain Darcy myself, if you desire it. But I wouldn't do this without consulting you."

"You will do me the greatest favour possible," rejoined Stanley.

"I will urge him to go at once, and point out the consequences likely to ensue if he remains here," said her ladyship. "After my representations, I think he will see the necessity of immediate departure."

"I have no doubt of it," said Stanley. "You place me under the deepest obligations to you—and Mildred ought to be equally obliged."

"She must know nothing of my intentions, or she would do her best to thwart them," said her ladyship.

"The sooner you act the better," said Stanley, anxiously.

"I will seize the first opportunity that

offers," said Lady Talmash. "Now let us go and look after them."

In a frame of mind which will be easily understood, Stanley conducted her to the stables, where they found the squire giving some directions to a groom, while Darcy and Mildred were conversing together at some distance from him.

"Look there!" said Lady Talmash, pointing them out to her companion.

"You are right," he replied, scarcely able to control himself. "This is intolerable."

"Pray be calm!" she rejoined. "Send him to me. I will stop here."

Stanley instantly obeyed, and hurrying towards the pair who were too much occupied with each other to notice his arrival, said, with as much calmness as he could command:

"Sorry to interrupt you, Captain Darcy, but I come to tell you that Lady Talmash wishes to say a word to you."

"To me!" cried Darcy, startled. "Where is she?"

"Yonder—at the other side of the yard."

"I'll be back in a moment," said Darcy, as he hurried off.

Mildred did not say a word to her husband, but immediately proceeded to her father.

"Your ladyship wishes to speak to me I understand," said Darcy, as he approached her.

"Yes, I have something to say in private," she replied. "We may be interrupted here."

And she left the yard, accompanied by Darcy, who guessed what was coming.

As soon as they had gained a retired walk she stopped, and said in a determined tone:

"You must leave Beaucliffe at once, Captain Darcy. I insist upon it. I see through your designs, and am determined to put a stop to them."

"And your ladyship expects me to obey your commands?" he said.

"I do," she replied, in the same determined tone as before, "and I cannot doubt your compliance with them."

"Then you will find yourself mistaken," he replied. "I mean to remain at Beaucliffe as long as Mr. Warburton is good

enough to receive me. I disdain to notice your insinuations, except to declare positively that they are unfounded."

"Mr. Warburton will think differently when I speak to him on the subject," said her ladyship; "and I am convinced he won't suffer you to remain in his house another hour. He knows the great affection I have for his daughter, and that I would rather die than allow her happiness to be destroyed."

"I defy you to prove that your suspicions are correct," cried Darcy. "I have said and done nothing that I cannot justify both to Mr. Warburton and his son-in-law. I have the greatest admiration for Mrs. Stanley Brereton, but it is accompanied with the profoundest respect."

"Do not think to impose upon me, sir," rejoined her ladyship, with an incredulous smile. "Stanley Brereton shall not be wronged — Mr. Warburton shall not be made wretched—nor Mildred disgraced—if I can prevent it. Go, you shall. If you dare to remain, after the warning I have given you, you will take the consequences."

Darcy began to be alarmed.

"I certainly do not desire to cause any unpleasantness to such a worthy gentleman as Mr. Warburton," he said; "and therefore I will go. But I do not for a moment admit the truth of your ladyship's accusation."

"You have decided rightly," she rejoined, in an approving tone. "Go, and you shall hear no more about it."

"How can I go?" cried Darcy. "What excuse can I offer for my sudden departure?"

"I will find some excuse for you," she replied.

Darcy reflected for a moment, and then said:

"I have it. Luckily, my groom is here. Will your ladyship be good enough to send him to me with both horses. I will then depart immediately, and relieve you of any further anxiety. Say what you please for me to the squire. He will think me mad —but I cannot help it."

"I will go at once," rejoined Lady Talmash, delighted at having accomplished her object so successfully.

And she hastened to the stable-yard,

while Darcy proceeded to the drive in front of the house. Both horses were ready, and the groom standing with them, so she sent him round at once.

As soon as Darcy had mounted, he said to his man:

"Ride back to Beaucliffe as fast as you can. Get my things, and follow me to Knutsford."

The groom looked astounded by the order, but prepared to obey it, while his master galloped off.

Great consternation prevailed in the stable-yard.

"What the deuce is the matter?" said the squire to Lady Talmash. "Have you frightened my guest away?"

"Yes, I believe he's gone," replied her ladyship, laughing.

"This is really too bad," cried Mildred, looking very much put out. "You take rather too much upon yourself."

"You won't think so, my dear, when we come to talk the matter over," whispered Lady Talmash.

"But is Captain Darcy really gone?" inquired Mildred in the same low tone.

"I hope so—and believe so," replied her ladyship.

Mildred asked no more, but looked at her father, who seemed quite perplexed.

Stanley did not care to conceal his satisfaction at having got rid of the dangerous intruder, and took the earliest opportunity of thanking Lady Talmash for the great service she had rendered him. He then left the stable-yard, and told his mother what had occurred. She was much pleased by the intelligence.

"This is a great relief to me," she cried. "Truly Lady Talmash is an invaluable friend."

"She is indeed," replied Stanley, earnestly. "I have found her so on many former occasions. But never more than now."

After Darcy's sudden dismissal Mildred did not seem so fond of her friend as before, and told her she had been guilty of unwarrantable interference; but they very soon made up the quarrel, and Lady Talmash convinced her she had acted for the best.

The squire likewise highly approved of her ladyship's conduct, and confessed he had acted very injudiciously in inviting Darcy to the house.

About the same time a reconciliation occurred between Stanley and his wife. Whether this was accomplished by the same kind friend we cannot tell, but she was greatly rejoiced when it took place.

Stanley certainly seemed much happier, but he could not prevail upon his wife to fix any time for her removal to Brereton.

As before, whenever he mentioned the subject to her she laughed it off, and even Lady Talmash advised him not to trouble her.

"She won't go," said her ladyship. "So it is useless to try and persuade her. I really believe she is afraid of a certain old lady, and dreads her interference."

"Very likely," replied Stanley. "But I can't part with that dear old lady, even to please my wife."

"Then let things be," said Lady Talmash.

## VII.

### STANLEY PASSES THE NIGHT IN THE HAUNTED ROOM.

One day, when Stanley was at Brereton, old Minshull told him privately, and with a very mysterious look, that he had heard strange sounds in the house on the previous night.

"Indeed! Where did you hear the noises, and at what hour?" inquired Stanley.

"I heard them in the gallery, soon after midnight," replied the old servant. "I went out as soon as I could with a light, and looked about, but could see no one. Half an hour later I heard the same sounds again, and went out once more as quickly as I could, but not a soul was visible."

"The ghost must have come back to us again," remarked Stanley.

Minshull did not seem inclined to laugh.

"I thought the sounds came from the haunted chamber, sir," he said.

"Did you go in?" asked Stanley.

"I couldn't sir," replied the old man. "The door was locked inside."

"Locked inside!" cried Stanley. "Then some one must have been in the room."

"I knocked and called out—but not very loudly, for fear of alarming my mistress. But no one answered. Early in the morning I again tried the door and found it unfastened."

"Strange!" exclaimed Stanley. "I tell you what, Minshull," he added, after a little reflection, "I'll sleep in that room to-night."

"Better not, sir," cried the old man, "you'll get a shock. I'm quite sure it's the ghost," he added, with an air of profound conviction.

Stanley ordered him not to say a word on the subject to the women servants; nor did he himself inform his mother that he meant to pass the night at Brereton, as he feared to alarm her; but he directed the

old servant to prepare the haunted room for him.

"Mark what I say, Minshull," he added. "At eleven o'clock you will find me at the front door. By that time my mother and the women will have retired to rest, and I can go up-stairs without arousing them."

The old man promised that all his orders should be strictly attended to, and the bed ready for him. "I can make that myself," he added.

Stanley was rather more communicative to his wife, and told her of his intention of passing the night in the haunted chamber, laughingly asking if she would accompany him.

"Decidedly not," replied Mildred. "I should die of fright if I saw the ghost."

To prevent any idle talk Stanley walked over from Beaucliffe. The night was very dark with no moon and not a single star to be seen.

On arriving he rapped at the front door, which was immediately opened by Minshull.

Having made all necessary preparations in the dark, they slowly mounted the great staircase. The boards did not creak, nor

was the slightest sound, likely to betray them, audible; but Stanley fancied that a dark figure preceded them.

He breathed his suspicions to Minshull, but the old man declared he heard nothing —nor could anything whatever be seen in the profound gloom—and Stanley did not like to use a small pistol, which he carried, for fear of alarming his mother and the house.

The gallery was quite as dark as the staircase, but Stanley thought he perceived the same phantom-like figure gliding along, but it almost instantly disappeared.

Minshull had purposely left the door of the haunted chamber unlocked, and found it so on his return. On entering he struck a match and lighted a taper, which revealed the antique bedstead, with its rich and sombre curtains, and the dark old wardrobe and furniture, all looking very grim and ghostly.

Stanley's first business was to take from his pocket the small pistol just alluded to, and place it on a little table near the bed.

"May I ask if that pistol is loaded, sir,"

asked Minshull, watching the proceeding with uneasiness.

"Loaded with ball," replied Stanley. "Come to me early in the morning."

"I will, sir," replied Minshull. "I hope you may have a good night. The bed's as comfortable as I could make it."

"No doubt—but I shan't use it."

Just as Minshull was going out, he stopped, and added, "Pray don't use that pistol, sir!"

"Make yourself easy, I don't mean to use it, unless compelled."

And the old man departed.

"Why is he so afraid of the pistol?" thought Stanley.

Left alone, Stanley looked carefully round, but saw nothing to lead him to suspect that any one was concealed in the chamber.

Though the bed seemed very tempting, he resolved not to occupy it, but sat down in an arm-chair, which was conveniently placed near the little table, and presently fell asleep.

How long he remained in this state he could not tell, but some slight sound

aroused him, and he beheld a female figure standing near the partly-open door.

A momentary view of this figure revealed features of great beauty, but pale as death. The dress was that of some religious order, with the veil thrown back.

He saw no more, for, as he started to his feet, the taper was instantly extinguished; and, judging by the sound, the strange apparition must have passed through the door and closed it.

Stanley quickly followed, but could distinguish nothing in the sombre gallery. Nor could he re-light the taper, for the matches were gone.

We shall not now inquire into the nature of his reflections, but defer their consideration to the morning.

Again sitting down in the arm-chair, he again fell asleep.

At daybreak he awoke, and, looking round the chamber, perceived a small piece of folded paper on the floor. He took it up, and, opening it, read these words traced in pencil:

"Do not search for me. You will not find me. I shall appear again at the right

time. I have something important to communicate."

This strange missive greatly puzzled him, though he had already come to the conclusion that Minshull knew more of the matter than he chose to confess.

Not long afterwards, the old servant himself rapped at the door, and was instantly admitted.

On his entrance, he looked inquiringly at Stanley, and said: "Well, sir, have you seen the ghost?"

"I have," replied the other, significantly, "and so have you."

"*I*, sir!" exclaimed Minshull. "I heard it, as I told you, but didn't see it."

"Don't attempt to impose upon me," cried Stanley, angrily. "You know who this supposed apparition is, and for what purpose the crazed being who plays the part has come here. Who is she, I say? What is the meaning of the mystification? Speak plainly if you would obtain forgiveness for the deception you have practised upon me!"

Minshull did not answer for a minute or two.

Then assuming an air of contrition, he said:

"I fear I have done wrong, sir; but I acted for the best."

"What have you done?" asked Stanley, impatiently. "Who is the lady, I repeat?—and what brings her here?"

Minshull again hesitated, but finding Stanley determined to have an answer, he said:

"She is Sister Aline."

"Sister Aline! I never heard of her."

"Oh, yes, you have, sir," replied Minshull. "She is the lady who went to Dieppe with your uncle, Sir Thomas Starkey, and was with him when he was killed in a duel by Captain Darcy."

"But that unhappy lady retired into a religious house," said Stanley. "Ah, I see!" he exclaimed, "that accounts for her strange attire. Why has she come here?"

"Excuse me, sir, I am bound to secresy on that point," replied Minshull. "Nor can I tell you why she has been allowed to come into the house. But I am sure you will approve of her design when you learn it."

"Does my mother know Sister Aline is here?" inquired Stanley.

"No, sir, she does not. I thought it best to keep the matter from her for a time, at least."

"I know not what to think of the strange proceeding," said Stanley. "But I trust no harm will come of it."

"Have no fear, sir," rejoined Minshull. "If I did not feel certain the poor lady means well, I would never have consented to act with her. You seem to fancy she is not in her right mind, sir—but that is a great mistake. She is as rational as either of us."

"One more question, and I have done," remarked Stanley. "Why was that strange story told me about the ghost?"

"Pray, excuse my saying more at present, sir," replied Minshull. "In due time Sister Aline will give you a full explanation of all that now appears mysterious."

"Well, my curiosity is still unsatisfied. But, to make an end, tell this poor lady—for whom I have the deepest sympathy—tell her, I say, from me, that she can remain at Brereton, and occupy this room, as long as she thinks proper, and whenever she

desires to speak to me I will see her. She need not appear as a ghost."

"I will do your bidding, sir," replied Minshull. "You now perceive I was right when I recommended you not to use your pistol. Suppose you had shot Sister Aline?"

"I *won't* suppose it," said Stanley, putting the pistol in his pocket. "And now it is time I should start for Beaucliffe. Go down before me and open the door. You may expect me again in the afternoon."

As Stanley descended the staircase and crossed the entrance hall, he did not perceive that he was watched from the gallery by Sister Aline.

## VIII.

### SISTER ALINE'S LETTER.

STANLEY deemed it best to say nothing for the present to his wife, or any one else at Beaucliffe, about the strange occurrences of the previous night.

When Mildred, therefore, questioned him on the subject, he returned an evasive answer, but the expression of his countenance was so singular, that she told him she was sure the ghost must have been laughing at him.

Neither the squire nor Lady Talmash were aware of his nocturnal visit to Brereton, and he did not enlighten them on the subject.

In the afternoon,—while the ladies took a drive in the phaeton, and the squire

accompanied them on horseback,—he returned to the old mansion. His curiosity had been strongly excited, and he hoped something might occur to gratify it.

He found his mother in the garden, and after a little converse with her, entered the house, and proceeded to the library, where Minshull brought him a letter, and having delivered it hurried out of the room.

Eagerly tearing open the envelope, Stanley found a long, closely-written letter, and at once commenced its perusal. It ran thus:

"I said you should hear from me, and I now fulfil my promise.

"As you are already aware who I am, I will only say that I was with Sir Thomas Starkey when he was killed by Darcy in a duel at Dieppe.

"After that tragic event, I hoped Heaven would take me, but my prayers were unheard. Possibly, I may have been spared for some purpose.

"I then entered a religious house, and trust that my sighs and tears, my constant prayers, and the severe acts of penance I perform, may serve to blot out my guilt.

"Pardon rests with a merciful and gracious Heaven! But the heavy load that weighed upon my breast, and well-nigh crushed me, is somewhat lightened, and hope begins to dawn upon me.

"I should never have quitted, even for a short time, the asylum wherein I have taken refuge, had I not learnt that the perfidious Darcy, who had done me so much injury, had vowed to rob you of your lovely wife, and was endeavouring to carry out his wicked design.

"The pain given me by these tidings was indescribable. I besought Heaven to shield her from the destroyer, but still dreadful fears beset me, and unable to shake them off, I consulted the Lady Superior, who was filled with compassion for me. After some consideration, she allowed me to quit the Retreat for a time, and proceed to England.

"Having heard much about this old mansion from the-ill-fated Sir Thomas, I resolved to come here, and I carried out my scheme. Your old servant, Minshull, and an elderly female assisted me. From inquiries I have caused to be made, I find that Darcy is still

in the neighbourhood, and, doubtless, still hopes for success in his wicked project.

"Should you desire to converse with me, come to the haunted chamber.

"ALINE."

Just then, as if especially summoned, Minshull entered the library.

"Is the lady in the haunted chamber?" demanded Stanley.

Minshull replied in the affirmative.

"Say I will come to her immediately."

The old servant at once obeyed the injunction, and when Stanley reached the gallery he was stationed near the mysterious chamber, and opened the door for him, closing it as soon as he had entered.

Sister Aline now stood before him in her dark religious dress, looking pale as death.

For a few moments they remained gazing at each other in silence, Stanley being greatly struck by the expression of the recluse's countenance.

At length she spoke.

"Strange as my conduct may seem, I have sought to serve you. I cannot deny that a desire for vengeance has likewise

influenced me, but my chief aim has been to preserve your wife. This man is more dangerous than you imagine, and will not easily abandon his purpose?"

"It would seem so," replied Stanley. "I thought he was gone. But it is evident he will not depart unless driven hence, and I must now undertake the task."

"No, leave it to me," rejoined Sister Aline. "I can easily get rid of him. But I shall not see him until to-morrow."

"To-morrow will be soon enough," said Stanley. "But I trust you will remain here."

"Such is my intention," she replied.

"Will you see my mother?"

"Not till my work is done. Not even then unless she consents to see me."

"Since you have decided to remain here," said Stanley, "I will give Minshull some further orders respecting you."

"None are needed. He and his old female assistant serve me perfectly."

"I am much pleased to hear it," replied Stanley. "To-morrow I shall be here again, and if you wish to see me, send word by Minshull."

Before departing, he took her hand, and raised it respectfully to his lips.

On reaching the entrance-hall, he met his mother returning from the garden, and remarked that she had a letter in her hand that looked like a telegraph message.

"Have you received some news?" he inquired.

"Yes," she replied. "We are going to have some visitors. "Who do you think are coming to stay at the hall?"

"I can't possibly guess," he rejoined.

"Lady Starkey and her niece, Rose," replied his mother.

"Indeed!" he exclaimed. "I am very glad to hear it. But I didn't think Rose was strong enough to travel."

"Oh! yes; she is much better than she was — and I trust quite out of danger. About a week ago, I wrote to Lady Starkey, asking her and Rose to come and spend a month with me, and she has just sent a telegram to inform me they will be here this afternoon."

"Rather sudden," cried Stanley—somewhat startled—for he thought of Sister

Aline. "I'm afraid you will scarcely be prepared for them."

"Don't alarm yourself, my dear boy," she rejoined, smiling. "They won't take me by surprise. I've got all quietly ready, for I felt certain they would come—and you see I was quite right."

"Well! Where do you mean to put them?" asked Stanley, rather curiously.

"For Lady Starkey I have chosen the large room in the gallery," replied Mrs. Brereton, "as I think it will exactly suit her. To Rose I have assigned the adjoining chamber, which you know is much smaller. They are sure to bring a lady's-maid with them, so she can sleep in the dressing-room."

"A very good arrangement," observed Stanley, approvingly. "The large room is so beautifully furnished that Lady Starkey must be charmed with it. And all the rest will do very well."

"I'm glad you're pleased," replied his mother. "I hope you will stay to welcome them. They'll be here in less than an hour."

"Then I'll certainly stay," he replied.

His mother now left the room to give some orders regarding her visitors, and Stanley could not help thinking what a strange coincidence it would be if Sister Aline and Lady Starkey should be lodged in the house at the same time. Still, he felt that neither ought to know it.

It likewise occurred to him that he ought to prepare Minshull for the new-comers, and an opportunity of doing so was quickly afforded by the entrance of the old servant.

"Harkee, Minshull," he cried. "Are you aware that Lady Starkey and her niece are coming here to-day?"

"Just heard so, sir," was the reply.

"Will their coming interfere with you?"

"Not much, sir. Don't be uneasy, I can manage."

"I know you are a man of great resources, Minshull."

"Yes, I flatter myself I am. But this is so unexpected. I wonder why my mistress didn't take me into her confidence. She generally does."

"You will certainly want some assistance, Minshull," said Stanley. "You can't do all the work yourself."

"I don't know what I can do till I try, sir. But I've no doubt her ladyship will make some allowances."

"I'm sure she will," replied Stanley. "And now mark what I say. Take the greatest care that Sister Aline does not hear of Lady Starkey's arrival, or it will most likely frighten her away."

"Rely upon that," replied the old servant.

About half an hour later, a smart-looking open carriage, hired at the railway station at Chester, drove up to Brereton Hall.

In it were Lady Starkey and her niece; and on the front seat were placed a couple of large trunks, together with several boxes, distinctly proclaiming that the fair owners had brought with them a goodly supply of dresses, and other articles likely to be required for their adornment during their stay. By the side of the coachman sat a very pretty lady's-maid.

No sooner did the two ladies make their appearance than Stanley and his mother came forth to bid them welcome; and loud were the expressions of delight on both sides at the meeting. The visitors were likewise greatly struck by the old mansion,

and loudly expressed their admiration of its picturesque beauty.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Lady Starkey, lifting up her hands. "What a remarkably pretty place you have made of it! I declare it is one of the nicest old houses I ever beheld! Don't you think so, Rose?"

"Indeed I do, aunty," replied the other. "I really was not prepared for such a charming place."

"Well, come with me!" cried Stanley, handing them out of the carriage. "I'm persuaded the interior of the house won't disappoint you."

"On the contrary, it far surpasses my expectations," cried Lady Starkey, as she stood still in the entrance hall and looked round.

"There's a staircase!" she exclaimed. "Perfect! isn't it, Rose?"

"Quite perfect, aunty. And the gallery beyond! What a picture one could make of it!"

"I hope you may paint it," said Stanley.

"Nothing I should like better," she replied.

Stanley then led them to the great ban-

queting-hall, with which they seemed still more delighted, and they remained for some time gazing at the old family portraits, and trying to discover a likeness between Stanley and some of his ancestors.

While they were thus occupied old Minshull came in to say that the coachman wished to depart, upon which Lady Starkey paid him and dismissed him.

Not since Stanley restored the old hall had he passed so pleasant an hour as he had on that afternoon.

Very little credit had been given him by his wife for what he had done, so that the commendations now bestowed upon him by Lady Starkey and Rose were doubly welcome.

Under the circumstances, it was extremely annoying to him to leave them so soon, but they readily accepted his excuse, and agreed to postpone any further inspection of the place until next day.

"I am quite charmed with what I have already seen," observed Lady Starkey; "and I make no doubt that a still greater treat is in store for me."

"I can't promise that," said Stanley.

"But there are several rooms that you have not yet looked at."

"I hope you will allow us to see the Haunted Chamber," said Rose. "I've the greatest curiosity to behold it."

Stanley looked quite confused by the request.

"You mustn't ask to see that room," he said.

"Why not?" rejoined Rose.

"I have a reason for refusal—but don't ask me to explain."

"Well, I must own I'm greatly disappointed," said Rose; "but perhaps you'll relent to-morrow."

Stanley made no reply, but immediately afterwards took leave, hoping to see them next day.

He found Minshull in the entrance hall, and being struck with a new idea, called to the old servant to follow him, and hurried up the great staircase to the gallery. His object was to inform Sister Aline of the arrival that had just occurred, and ascertain what she thought of it.

## IX.

### LADY STARKEY AND ROSE HYLTON AT BRERETON HALL.

On a slight signal, Sister Aline immediately opened the door and Stanley went into the room, Minshull remaining outside.

"Have you heard what has happened?" said Stanley.

"I have just been told by Minshull that Lady Starkey and her niece have arrived at the hall," she said. "But I feel no uneasiness on that account, for I am sure they won't disturb me."

"Every precaution shall be taken to secure you from intrusion," said Stanley. "But the difficulties have somewhat increased, for Miss Rose Hylton wants to see this chamber, and though, of course, I

shall not grant the request, you must keep the door fastened."

"It is always fastened," replied Sister Aline. "I only open it to Minshull or the old woman."

"But even greater caution will be necessary," said Stanley. "Recollect that there are now two more ladies and a lady's-maid in the house."

"I am quite aware of it," replied Sister Aline. "Lady Starkey's unlooked-for arrival has suggested something to me. I have long and deeply desired an interview with her, in the hope of obtaining her forgiveness."

"I do not think she will grant you an interview," replied Stanley, gravely. "It would be useless, therefore, to make the request."

"Nothing would induce me to intrude upon her," said Sister Aline; "or even approach her—save with her permission. I will, therefore, dismiss the thought which I ought not, perhaps, to have indulged for a single moment. But when her name was mentioned to me, and I found she was here—in the same house—I could scarcely

repress my desire to fling myself at her feet, and implore her forgiveness."

So much pain and contrition were depicted in the recluse's countenance that Stanley was deeply moved.

After reflecting for a few minutes, he said:

"I have somewhat altered my mind. Perhaps another opportunity of an interview with Lady Starkey may not occur. I, therefore, advise you not to neglect it. Go to her room to-night. Minshull will show it you. It is the largest in the gallery. Pass through the dressing-room, and you will gain the other chamber without difficulty."

"I will go there at midnight," replied Sister Aline, eagerly.

"And I trust you may be successful in your effort. Farewell!"

And he hastily quitted the room.

The party at Beaucliffe were greatly surprised at the tidings brought them by Stanley of the sudden arrival of Lady Starkey and her niece at Brereton Hall, as they had heard nothing whatever of any invitation being sent them.

Perhaps Mildred and Lady Talmash were not altogether pleased, but the squire

was delighted, and at once proposed that Mrs. Brereton, with her guests, should be invited to dinner next day.

"I shall be delighted to see them here," he said. "And I sincerely hope they will come. In fact, I should like them to dine with us constantly while they are at Brereton."

"Not constantly, papa," remarked Mildred. "That would be rather too much. I am not so very fond of Rose, and don't think she particularly likes me."

"Oh! you are mistaken," cried Stanley. "She admires you greatly."

"My wish is to make Lady Starkey feel quite at home here," said the squire. "I should like her to come whenever she pleases, and bring her niece with her. I hope you won't interfere."

"Certainly not," replied Mildred. "I dare say we shall get on very well together."

"You'll find Rose extremely amiable, I can assure you," remarked Stanley. "But you must recollect she is a great invalid, and unequal to much exertion."

"All that shall be carefully considered," rejoined Mildred. "I won't suggest any long rides on horseback to her."

"She takes no horse exercise whatever," said Stanley.

"Such a life wouldn't be worth living, in my opinion," remarked Mildred.

"One thing I must mention before I forget it," said the squire to Stanley. "Who do you think we saw this morning?"

"Can't tell," replied the other.

"Darcy," replied the squire. "We saw him near Knutsford."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Stanley, glancing at Lady Talmash. "Then his departure was only a pretence."

## X.

### THE INTERVIEW BETWEEN LADY STARKEY AND SISTER ALINE.

It was near midnight, and Lady Starkey, who was somewhat fatigued with her journey, was fast asleep in the antique bed that adorned the principal room in the gallery at Brereton.

Suddenly, some sound awoke her, and as a light was burning in the chamber, she became aware of a dark figure in a religious dress, standing at the foot of the bed.

For a few minutes she could not muster courage to address the supposed apparition, but at length she spoke.

"Who and what are you?" she asked, in trembling accents, scarcely expecting an answer.

"I have something to say to you," replied the phantom, in low and almost unearthly tones.

"Do you belong to the living or the dead?" said Lady Starkey.

"I still belong to the living," replied the figure, "but I have little to do with the world. Before I depart I would be at peace with all, and chiefly with you."

"Wherefore with me?" cried Lady Starkey.

"Because I have greatly wronged you," replied Sister Aline, "and I cannot hope for rest or freedom from remorse till I obtain your forgiveness."

"What do I hear?" cried Lady Starkey. "Your words awaken thoughts in my breast that I would willingly banish. I only know one person who has done me great wrong, and that person I cannot forgive."

"Wherefore not?" said Sister Aline, in a supplicatory tone.

"The injury is too great," replied Lady Starkey, who now began to think she recognised the supposed spiritual visitant.

"But I will make every atonement in

my power," cried Sister Aline. "No penance so severe that I will not perform."

"Pain and suffering on your part will not gratify me, for I seek not vengeance," said Lady Starkey. "No torture I could inflict on you would be so exquisite as that you have inflicted on me. But that is past, and the wrong can never be redressed. You must seek for forgiveness from an all-merciful Judge. I would forgive you if I could. But I should merely pronounce words without meaning and without effect."

"Then you bid me depart," cried Sister Aline, in accents of despair. "Give me, at least, a hope that you will not always withhold forgiveness from me."

"I can make no promise," said Lady Starkey, coldly. "And I must forbid you ever to approach me again."

"Oh, say not so!" exclaimed Sister Aline.

"Begone! Your presence troubles me," said Lady Starkey.

"I obey," said Sister Aline. "But before I depart let me say that this step which has so much displeased you was counselled by Stanley Brereton. Further-

more, let me entreat you not to breathe a word concerning me to Mrs. Brereton till you have consulted with her son."

"So far I will comply with your request," replied Lady Starkey. "But why are you here?"

"In the hope of defeating the designs of a villain who would destroy the happiness of a lovely young creature. She has foolishly listened to him, but I still hope to save her."

"And you have come here with that object?"

"With that object alone."

"Then I will willingly aid you."

"I think I can accomplish my purpose unaided. But should I fail I will leave the task to you."

"And I will not shrink from it," said Lady Starkey. "I do not think I can be wrong in concluding that the dangerous villain you have referred to is Darcy?"

"You have guessed rightly," replied Sister Aline. "And the lovely creature for whom he has spread his snares is Stanley Brereton's wife. But should you converse with her on the subject beware what you say, or you may cause irreparable mischief. The

present moment is fraught with the greatest peril to the fair Mildred. But I still hope to save her."

Ere Lady Starkey could put another question, Sister Aline was gone.

## XI.

### MILDRED'S FLIGHT.

When Lady Starkey came down to breakfast next morning, both Mrs. Brereton and Rose were struck with her changed expression.

She accounted for it by saying she had passed a very restless night, but there was an anxiety in her looks that did not seem merely caused by want of sleep.

She was very careful not to say anything that might imply a doubt as to her belief in the perfect happiness of the young couple at Beaucliffe, but she could not help expressing surprise that they did not live at Brereton.

"At first Stanley was very much put

out," said Mrs. Brereton; "but he now seems reconciled to the arrangement."

They had not long finished breakfast when the whole party came over from Beaucliffe, Mildred being brought by her father in order to give a general invitation to the ladies.

Now that Lady Starkey had learnt the young wife's secret she could not but regard her with the deepest interest, and hoped she might be exposed to no further danger.

As to the fair creature whose thoughtless conduct occasioned so much anxiety among those around her, she seemed as gay and unconcerned as if she had not a care.

She had ridden over that morning, and as nothing suited her so well as a riding-habit, she was seen to the greatest advantage. Knowing what she did Lady Starkey regarded her with wonder. Could she be so thoughtless as she had been represented? Could she listen to such a man as Darcy?

Lady Starkey thought it quite impossible, and began to doubt everything that had been told her to the lovely creature's disadvantage.

Nothing could be more agreeable than the manner in which Mildred delivered her father's invitation to the two ladies. She told them he would always be delighted to see them at Beaucliffe, and begged them to come whenever they felt inclined.

A manner like this could not fail to produce a favourable impression. Lady Starkey was charmed with her.

At length an opportunity occurred for a little private converse between Lady Starkey and Lady Talmash. Mildred and Rose had disappeared, and the squire was sitting with Mrs. Brereton in the library. The two first-mentioned ladies were walking in the garden, when Lady Starkey said:

"Captain Darcy has been at Beaucliffe lately, has he not? What has become of him? He has not returned to town"

"I thought he was gone," replied Lady Talmash. "But we saw him yesterday, while we were riding out near Knutsford."

"What can he be doing here?" remarked Lady Starkey, looking inquiringly at her.

"I really cannot tell," replied Lady Tal-

mash. "No good, I'm afraid. But it seems necessary I should inform your ladyship that he paid a great deal too much attention to Stanley's charming wife, and I was obliged to speak to him on the subject."

"Did he attend to the hint?"

"Apparently so. He immediately left the house, and promised not to trouble us again. But he is here still, as I have said."

"That is very vexatious," said Lady Starkey.

"At any cost we must get rid of him," cried Lady Talmash. "He cannot be allowed to remain here."

"Is there any danger in his presence, think you?" asked Lady Starkey.

"A great deal," replied Lady Talmash. "He has fallen desperately in love with Mildred, and will not abandon the pursuit."

"But you don't think she would be led away by him?" cried Lady Starkey, looking aghast.

"She's so very thoughtless that she might take the fatal step without reflecting on its consequences. Were she to do so I think it would kill her excellent father."

"She must never be allowed to take that step," said Lady Starkey. "Rather than run the risk of such a sad mischance, I will warn Mr. Warburton."

"That will be useless. He will never believe in the danger, though it is palpable to every one else. And Stanley is just as blind. The mischief will be done before they are aware of it."

"I must now tell you that since I came here I have met a person who undertakes to free us from this great danger," said Lady Starkey.

"Is it a woman?" asked Lady Talmash.

"It is."

"She overrates her power. Darcy can only be driven hence by Stanley."

"Here he comes," said Lady Starkey, as Stanley entered the garden. "We have been talking over your affairs," she added to him, "and have come to the conclusion that you must act energetically."

"What would you have me do?" he asked.

"Drive Darcy from this neighbourhood," she replied.

"I will, if I can find him," he said. "But where is he?"

"Somewhere near Knutsford. You must make inquiries."

"I will do so to-morrow."

"Why not to-day?" demanded Lady Talmash.

"Because I expect some assistance will be rendered me, and I may do more harm than good if I am too precipitate."

"Where is your wife?" asked Lady Talmash. "I don't see her in the garden."

"Most likely she is at the stables," replied Stanley.

"Let us go thither," said Lady Talmash.

Accordingly, they quitted the garden and went towards the stables, but as they were proceeding thither they met a groom, who told them that about half an hour before, Mrs. Stanley Brereton had mounted her horse, and ridden back by herself to Beaucliffe.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Stanley, surprised. "Did no one attend her?"

"No, sir," replied the groom. "I offered to go with her myself, but she declined."

"This is strange!" said Lady Talmash.

"Very strange, I should think," cried Lady Starkey. And she added in a low tone to Stanley, "You ought to follow, and look after her."

"She would not be pleased if I did," he replied.

"This is an unusual circumstance," said Lady Starkey. "You can't tell what has happened. It's your duty to go."

"Well, if your ladyship entertains that opinion, I'll set off at once," he replied; "though I'm sure she'll be displeased with me. Here, Tom," he added to the groom, "saddle my horse, and bring him out at once."

The groom went immediately to the stables.

"I can't help suspecting something," whispered Lady Talmash to the other. "I haven't a horse here, to-day, or I'd gallop over myself."

In another minute the groom came out, and Stanley sprang on his horse.

"I shall be back very shortly," he said, as he dashed off, "and I hope to bring you word that all's right."

As he turned round he saw they were watching him, and being now excited, he galloped all the way to Beaucliffe.

On arriving there he began to feel rather foolish, thinking Mildred would laugh at him; but when he entered the court-yard

he found two or three servants there, and inquired whether his wife had returned. To his great surprise, they replied in the negative.

Not wishing to excite their curiosity, he made some slight observation, and then started back again as quickly as he came.

Both ladies were still standing near the stables, and they guessed from his looks what had happened.

"I see you have not found her," cried Lady Talmash, running to meet him. "Depend upon it, she is gone."

"No doubt of it," said Lady Starkey. "Of course you will start instantly in pursuit."

"Whither shall I go?" he asked with a distracted look.

"To Knutsford," replied Lady Talmash. "You will learn something there."

"I have very little hope of finding her," he rejoined. "But, till you see me again, say not a word about her flight to Mr. Warburton or my mother."

"Your injunctions shall be strictly attended to, and we pray that you may be successful," said Lady Talmash.

Dashing through the gate which had

been left open, Stanley galloped off, nor did he slacken his pace in the slightest degree till he reached Knutsford.

On entering the town, he rode at once to the Angel Inn, and inquired for Captain Darcy, but could learn nothing of him. The captain had left on the previous day, and was most probably gone to London. Stanley next asked whether Mrs. Stanley Brereton had been there that morning, and was told that she had not.

Moreover, the landlord felt quite certain that she had not been in Knutsford that day. Had it been otherwise, he or his wife or some of his establishment must infallibly have seen her.

Stanley made many further inquiries, but none that led to any satisfactory result.

He next proceeded to the railway station, and found that several persons had travelled by Crewe to Euston Station, but whether Darcy and Mildred were among them, he could not ascertain. Certain it was that he had lost all trace of them for the present.

For nearly two hours he remained at Knutsford, and employed his time in

sending telegraphic messages in different directions, but they brought him no serviceable information. In fact, as time went on, he became more and more convinced that his wife was gone. How her father would bear the dreadful truth when presented to him he did not dare to think.

Only by a great effort could Stanley prevail upon himself to return to Brereton. He quite dreaded the painful interview he must of necessity have with the squire, and now regretted that he had not entrusted the task to the two ladies.

The worthy old gentleman had been lingering at Brereton in the expectation that his darling daughter would join him there; but as time went on, and she did not return, he became exceedingly uneasy, and his anxiety increased, because he could obtain no satisfactory explanation from Lady Starkey or Lady Talmash. Mindful of their promise to Stanley, they did not even hint to him that she might be gone, and he seemed to suspect nothing. Mrs. Brereton and Rose were equally unsuspicious, and sat quietly conversing together in the library.

When Stanley returned from Knutsford, the squire was in the entrance hall, and immediately called out:

"Where have you left your wife? Where is she, I say?"

Stanley made no direct reply, but begged him to come into the dining-room, and as he complied, closed the door.

"Now, what the deuce is the matter?" asked the squire.

"I must beg you to summon all your firmness, sir," said Stanley.

"You alarm me," rejoined Mr. Warburton, whose countenance expressed great anxiety. "Tell me at once what has occurred."

"My desire is to spare you all possible pain, sir," said Stanley. "But you must learn the truth."

"Of course," rejoined the old gentleman, growing impatient. "What is it?"

"Well, then, I am obliged to inform you that your daughter is gone."

"Gone!" exclaimed the squire, scarcely able to realise the terrible truth.

"Yes, she has left us both. She has gone away with Darcy."

"With Darcy!" exclaimed the old gen-

tleman, with a mingled expression of rage and disgust, "I would rather you had told me of her death."

"I felt certain such would be your feeling, sir," said Stanley, with a deeply sympathising look.

"It will be useless to follow them," cried the squire, whose anger was quite unabated. "I shall not take her back, and I conclude you won't. Since she has fixed herself with this deceitful fellow, she must remain with him."

After walking rapidly to and fro within the room, for a few minutes, he suddenly stopped, and asked:

"Where do you think they are gone?"

"I have no clue whatever, sir," said Stanley. "Perhaps, to London—perhaps, abroad."

"I care not where they go, since the step has been taken," said the squire. "But have you any proof that she has fled—or, is it only conjecture?"

"Only conjecture, at present, sir," replied Stanley. "But she is not to be found. I have been to Beaucliffe, and she has not been there, since she left this morning. Where can she be?"

"I know not," replied Mr. Warburton. "Stay! she may have left a letter. I saw her writing at that small table near the window at the further end of the room."

At this suggestion Stanley started off, and soon called out:

"There *is* a letter."

In another instant he had seized it and torn it open.

Seeing the squire was watching him he said:

"The letter is for me, you shall hear it presently."

He then ran his eye hastily over it, and almost let it fall.

"Our worst fears are realised," he cried in a voice of anguish. "There is no longer any doubt. She is gone."

"Pray read her letter to me!" cried Mr. Warburton, coming towards him.

## XII.

### MILDRED'S LETTER.

"I HAVE ceased to love you, Stanley, and cannot, therefore, remain with you longer.

"Once I loved you deeply, devotedly—far better than any one else—but that is long since past, and I will not profess affection I do not feel.

"I am about to leave you for ever. The resolution has been long taken, but I have only now found the courage to execute it.

"Forget me. You will be happier without me — happier with some one better suited to you.

"It will be useless to follow. You will not find me, and if you did I would not

return with you. Again I say forget me, as I hope to forget you.

"But the real pang remains. How shall I quit my dearest father, whose love for me, throughout my life, has been unceasing? In what way shall I requite his affection? By the basest ingratitude!—it would seem so. Yet I would prove my love for him if I could.

"I implore his forgiveness. I do not deserve it, I do not expect it, but I trust it may not be refused.

"MILDRED."

When the letter was concluded, the agonised father, overcome by emotion, sank into a chair, and covered his brow with his hands.

Things had been in this state for a few minutes, when the door was opened, and Lady Starkey and Lady Talmash entered the room.

On perceiving the letter in Stanley's hand, both immediately comprehended what had occurred, and were deeply touched by the scene presented to them. It was impossible, indeed, not to sympathise with the squire's distress.

Laying her hand upon his shoulder, in the gentlest manner, Lady Talmash endeavoured to rouse him, and at length succeeded.

Brushing the tears from his eyes, he said in broken accents, "Well, you see I have lost her! The comfort of my old age is gone. What shall I do without her?"

"It is sad, indeed!" exclaimed her ladyship in tones of deepest sympathy. "But, perhaps, it is better now than later."

"Am I to blame in any way?" asked the squire. "Have I done aught to cause this dire calamity?"

"One thing only," replied Lady Talmash. "You brought this Darcy to the house."

"True," he replied with a groan, "I now see the error I committed. But I had the most perfect confidence in my daughter."

"Read this," said Stanley, giving the letter to the two ladies; "you will then be able to form an exact opinion upon the case."

Two or three minutes were occupied in the perusal of the letter, during which

the looks of both ladies expressed amazement and indignation.

"Act on her advice, and forget her," said Lady Starkey to Stanley, as she gave him back the letter. "She does not deserve to be remembered."

"Is that all the counsel you have to give me?" he asked. "Shall I follow her?"

"No," replied Lady Starkey. "Even if you found her, which is doubtful, she evidently would not return with you."

"I am quite of the same opinion," added Lady Talmash. "You will only inflict further suffering on yourself, and on her excellent father, by any steps you may take for her recovery. Dearly as I loved Mildred—and I did love her dearly—I shall henceforward banish her from my heart. I recommend you to do likewise."

"Lady Talmash is right," observed the squire, who heard what was said. "No weakness must be shown. So little can I trust myself that were my unfortunate daughter to present herself before me and implore my pardon I should infallibly forgive her. This must not be. We must be firm."

"Am I to understand, sir," said Stanley, "that it is your express wish that no further steps be taken for the present?"

"Not unless we receive some positive intelligence," said the old gentleman. "And I do not think that at all likely. But I shall not return until late to Beaucliffe." Then, addressing himself to the two ladies, he begged them to send Mrs. Brereton to him. "I want to talk to her in private on this most painful affair," he said, "and make no doubt that I shall derive great comfort from her discourse."

"We will send her immediately," replied the two ladies, as they quitted the room with Stanley.

But nearly half an hour elapsed before Mrs. Brereton went to the squire, and she then found him fast asleep in an easy-chair, and did not disturb him.

## XIII.

### SISTER ALINE COMMANDS MILDRED TO RETURN.

Two persons have just entered a large well-furnished private room in the principal hotel of the ancient city of Chester.

One of them, a lovely young creature, wears a riding-habit, that sets off her light and graceful figure to the utmost advantage.

Apparently she has come from a distance, for she seems somewhat fatigued, and flinging herself upon a sofa, takes off her hat and lets loose a profusion of the loveliest golden tresses.

An officer is with her, who is evidently desperately enamoured, and watches her every movement with admiration. He is

tall, well-built, with very striking features, and a dark complexion.

Following her to the sofa, he takes her hand, already divested of the glove, and raises it to his lips.

Passionately devoted is the look he fixes upon her, as he exclaims:

"Now you are mine."

It is evident that the room has been prepared for them. A cloth has been laid on the dining-table, and all other necessary preparations made, and a waiter now comes in to inquire whether he shall serve the repast, and is answered in the affirmative.

The pair, who will be easily recognised, seem in good spirits, and not even the lady manifests any compunction at the perilous step she has taken, for she laughs as gaily as usual.

Presently a couple of waiters enter, and placing several small dishes on the table, together with iced champagne and a flask of Malmsey Madeira, serve the guests, and then discreetly retire.

The fugitives, who do not seem to have lost their appetites by the ride, are still in full enjoyment of the dinner, which comprises many delicacies, and Mildred has just

raised a second glass of champagne to her lips, when a strange and startling interruption occurs.

The door suddenly opens, not to admit a waiter, with a further supply of good things, but a lady, clad in a dark religious garb, and looking like a nun.

Closing the door after her, this strange intruder walks quickly up to Mildred, and caring nothing for the alarm she causes, lays her hand upon the runaway wife's arm, and says, in a stern authoritative tone:

"I have come to bid you return forthwith to the husband you have quitted."

Already Darcy has sprung up in his seat, and calls out fiercely:

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?"

But Sister Aline utterly disregards him, and again addresses Mildred, who shrinks from her with terror.

"Return with me, I say, to your husband and your father, and all will yet be well. Come at once, and I promise you forgiveness. It will be useless to resist. I have followed you from Brereton Hall, and will not return without you."

"Send this mad woman away," almost shrieked Mildred. "She frightens me to death!"

But Darcy felt that a scene must not be made, and resolved to proceed cautiously.

"Who are you?" he said to Sister Aline. "Methinks, I have seen you before."

"You ought to remember me, Captain Darcy," she rejoined, with a look that froze his blood. "I was with Sir Thomas Starkey when he was shot by you at Dieppe."

"I thought so," he answered, with a shudder.

"After that terrible event," continued Sister Aline, "I entered a religious retreat, and only came forth to rescue this thoughtless creature from your toils. Nor will I desist from my task till I have accomplished it. I will save her. She shall come back with me. Come, madam!"

And she held out her hand to Mildred.

But the latter resolutely refused obedience to her behest.

"I will only be taken by force," she said. "And I call on Captain Darcy to protect me."

Sister Aline regarded her in anger and astonishment.

"Are you determined to sacrifice yourself thus!" she cried. "Now is your time of safety. Be warned! be warned!"

"Nothing can turn me!" said Mildred, in a firm tone. "My resolution is taken. You waste time here. Begone!"

Sister Aline looked imploringly at her, but the appeal proved vain; and checking the terrible malediction that rose to her lips, she rushed out of the room.

As nothing further occurred, they concluded she was gone.

But the danger was not over.

"We must not remain here," said Darcy.

"Where shall we go," asked Mildred.

"To France," he replied. "We will cross to Boulogne, to-night. They won't follow us there."

## XIV.

### HOW THE SQUIRE RETURNED TO BEAUCLIFFE.

As might naturally be expected, all was thrown into confusion by Mildred's sudden flight.

The squire, as we are aware, had intended to give a little dinner on that day to Lady Starkey and Rose, but the design was abandoned, and he remained to dine quietly with Mrs. Brereton, who did the best she could for him and the others.

After dinner, Lady Starkey had retired to her own room, and was thinking over what had happened, when the door communicating with the dressing-room was opened, and Sister Aline came in.

"I thought I should see you," said her

ladyship. "Do you bring any tidings of the fugitive?"

"Yes," she replied, sadly. "I found her at Chester with Darcy, but could not induce her to return."

"I feared it would prove so," said Lady Starkey. "Who would have thought that one so well married, and blessed with such a happy home, would fling all away as she has done? It looks like madness."

"It is little better than madness," rejoined Sister Aline. "I pity both husband and father, but chiefly Mr. Warburton, as I am sure his love for her is deepest."

"Undoubtedly it will be a very severe blow to him. Can you offer him any consolation?"

"None whatever," replied Sister Aline. "Were I to describe the exact impression she produced on me, he would think I exaggerated. Conduct more heartless cannot be conceived. I wish he could forget her, but that I fear is impossible. However, I will do the best I can. Bid Stanley bring him to my chamber, and I will try to reason with him."

So saying she retired, and Lady Starkey immediately afterwards went down stairs,

and told Stanley what she had just heard.

An explanation had then to be given to the squire, who expressed a most anxious desire to see Sister Aline. Accordingly, he and Stanley went to her room.

She at once admitted them, and Mr. Warburton said to her eagerly :

"I am told you have seen my daughter since her flight?"

"I have," she replied, "and she seemed as gay as if she had been on a wedding excursion. My best efforts were used to induce her to return—but without avail. She is gone, and you must endeavour to reconcile yourself to her loss. I can give you no consolation."

"I hardly like to say it, sir," interposed Stanley, "but I think you are best without her."

The unhappy father could not repress a groan.

"The extraordinary kindness you have shown her merits a very different return," said Sister Aline. "But you must try to bear your heavy disappointment. I repeat I can give you no consolation, or I would gladly do so. As far as I can judge, she

had forgotten both husband and father, and their wisest course will be to forget her."

"That will be impossible," said the squire; "so I shall not make the attempt."

"For my own part," said Stanley, "I am resolved to have a speedy satisfaction for the deep wrong inflicted upon me, and with that purpose I shall follow the fugitives to-morrow."

"Weigh well your determination," said the squire. "If any man deserves punishment it is Darcy, for he has betrayed the confidence placed in him in the basest manner, but I do not think it will mend the matter to kill him."

"Remember that he shot Sir Thomas Starkey," said Sister Aline. "That constitutes an additional motive for vengeance."

"I have not forgotten it," said Stanley, sternly.

"Wait till to-morrow," said the squire. "And we can then decide what shall be done. I did not mean to return to Beaucliffe to-night, but have again changed my mind."

"I will go with you, sir," said Stanley.

They then took leave of Sister Aline, and quitted the room.

Since the squire, at the last moment, had determined to return, Lady Talmash announced her intention of accompanying him, and begged Rose to go with her.

Accordingly, the carriage was ordered, and Mr. Warburton and Stanley with the two ladies drove to Beaucliffe.

On arriving at the house, the squire experienced a great shock, and would have fallen as he entered, had not Stanley supported him.

The sight of the many attached servants, collected in the hall to express their sympathy, affected him deeply.

He waved his hand in recognition, seized a candle, and, hurrying up-stairs with Stanley, who attended him to the last, sought his chamber. Many a tearful eye followed him.

## XV

### THE PORTRAIT.

The squire scarcely slept at all that night, and was in such a highly feverish state next morning that it was found necessary to have advice.

Accordingly an old medical practitioner, who had long attended him, was sent for, and by this gentleman he was ordered to remain in bed and keep as quiet as possible. The poor squire was very unwilling to comply with these injunctions, but there was no help for it, for when he attempted to arise he felt quite light-headed and unable to stand.

Very little was said to him about his daughter, though he was most anxious to obtain further particulars of her flight, but

he contrived to extort a promise from Stanley not to set off in pursuit of Darcy without his consent, which it was quite evident he did not mean to grant.

The squire's bedroom was large and handsome, and over the chimney-piece hung a portrait of Mildred, taken about two years previously.

This portrait—a very beautiful work of art—was a great comfort to him at this painful juncture. The curtains of the bed were drawn back, so that he could contemplate the lovely features while reclining on his pillow; and it may be safely said that they had never pleased him so much before.

"I may never behold her again," he thought, "but I shall always have that portrait with me; and I must take good care of it."

Mr. Warburton did not improve so rapidly as those around him anticipated. Up to this date he had never really known a day's illness—his constitution being so robust that he could shake off an ordinary ailment at once. But now the blow proved too much for him. His moral system gave way. During a few days the fever increased, and

for a short time seemed to affect his brain, and he rambled a good deal about Mildred.

During this critical period Lady Starkey came over to Beaucliffe, and she and Lady Talmash watched by turns at the squire's couch. We will not venture to assert that his life was saved by this gentle nursing—though the old surgeon was of that opinion—and certainly no man could have been more fortunate in regard to nurses than Mr. Warburton, for even Rose came and sat by his side.

But there was another person, whom the squire wished to see, and he spoke to Stanley about her. This was Sister Aline. The recluse had produced a great impression upon him, and he wished to converse with her. Would she come, now and then, and sit by him at night? Stanley had no doubt she would, and promised to ask her. Next day, he brought word that she would come, and in the evening the carriage was sent for her.

On her arrival, she was met by Stanley, and at once taken to the squire's room. Lady Starkey was still there, but she immediately arose, and after bidding the squire

good night, departed. Stanley left at the same time.

Sister Aline then knelt down, and prayed long and fervently; after which she arose and took Lady Starkey's seat.

"I wished to see you," said the squire, "as I have something to say to you. For several days I have not mentioned my daughter's name to any one. Can you give me any information respecting her?"

"One of the sisters has written to tell me that she has gone with Darcy to Boulogne; and I believe it to be true. Probably they will go on to Paris, and perhaps to Italy."

"In any case, I shall never behold her again," said Mr. Warburton.

"You can scarcely regret that," said Sister Aline.

"Not now," replied the squire. "I have conquered the strong affection I once had for her, and wish never again to meet her, if I can help it, as the meeting would give me the greatest pain. You do not, I suppose, advise a reconciliation between us?"

"Certainly not, as long as she remains with Darcy. Were she to quit him, and lead a life of penitence, I should counsel

you to forgive her. But not now. Her heart, I trust, may be changed, but till I am satisfied it is so, I would reject her, were she to seek admission to a religious retreat. She has had her chance of restoration, but she has thrown it away."

"Are you willing to visit her again, and endeavour to bring her back from her errors?"

"I doubt whether she could be brought back," replied Sister Aline; "but I am certain it is a task far beyond my power—and I will not attempt it."

"Do not relinquish it without due consideration."

"But I may fail—and failure would to me be dreadful."

"With your earnestness and zeal, I do not think you can fail," said the squire.

"Well, I will reflect seriously upon the matter to-night, and tell you what I think in the morning. Say nothing more to me now."

Mr. Warburton leaned back on his pillow, and became perfectly silent.

That night he slept a few hours and awoke considerably refreshed next morning.

He was very anxious to learn whether

Sister Aline was willing to undertake the task he had proposed to her.

"I have thought the matter over," she said, "and though I doubt whether I shall succeed, I am willing to set out on the mission."

"When will you go?" asked the squire.

"Without delay," she replied. "I have nothing now to detain me here. I shall proceed at once to Boulogne, and if I do not find them there will go on to Paris."

"Then pray take that pocket-book with you," said Mr. Warburton, pointing to one lying on a chair beside the bed. "It contains bank-notes, and you will need a supply of money with you. Should you require more hereafter, write to me, and it shall be sent at once."

"When I have anything to communicate you shall hear from me," said Sister Aline.

"Is it your intention to set out at once?" asked the squire. "If so the carriage shall be ordered for you."

"I should like the carriage to take me to Chester."

"Your wishes in that respect shall be attended to, and anything else you may require," said Mr. Warburton.

At this moment Stanley entered the room.

"What sort of night have you passed?" he asked.

"The best since my attack," replied the squire. "But a change in the arrangements has taken place. Sister Aline is about to return to France, and will require the carriage to take her to Chester."

"When will she start?" asked Stanley.

"As soon as she has breakfasted," replied the squire.

"Then I will go down and give the necessary orders," said Stanley, quitting the room.

"Say nothing to him as to the errand on which you are bent," remarked the squire.

"I did not intend to do so," she replied. "He would interfere with my purpose, and instead of bringing back the fugitive wife we should have a duel, in which Stanley himself might possibly be killed. I will now bid you farewell. I shall not attempt to bring your daughter back unless I am satisfied she is truly penitent. I feel the difficulty of my task, and if I fail, as I may do, you must not blame me. Keep your-

self, I pray you, as composed as you can. Farewell! Heaven's peace be with you!"

On coming down stairs, Sister Aline was met by Stanley, who took her to the dining-room, where she made a slender breakfast. She then entered the carriage, which was already at the door, and drove off to Chester.

## XVI.

### SISTER ALINE PROCEEDS TO BOULOGNE.

As Sister Aline travelled by the night mail, she reached Boulogne at an early hour next morning. She found that a very good set of rooms had been engaged at the Hôtel des Bains by the fugitive couple, and she resolved to present herself to Mildred as soon as practicable. This was more easily accomplished than she expected, for she found a door partially open, and on looking into the room she saw Mildred, who had just returned from a bath.

Determined to take advantage of the opportunity, she entered the room and closed the door after her. On recognising

her, the young lady would have insisted on her immediate departure, but Sister Aline said with great quickness, "I am the bearer of a message to you from your father, and I hope you will allow me to deliver it."

"Is he well?" asked Mildred.

"He has been very dangerously ill," replied Sister Aline; "and his mind has been affected. But he is somewhat better now."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mildred. "I did not suppose he would have suffered so much."

"Were you not aware that he loved you better than anything on earth?"

"I knew that he loved me—but not to that extent."

"He would have made any sacrifice for you. Nor do I think he would now refuse you forgiveness, were you to beg it from him."

"I must confess I should like to behold him again."

"Depend upon it, you will never be perfectly happy till you are reconciled to him."

"I, myself, am of that opinion—but I fear it can never be. Stanley and I have not more completely separated than my father and myself."

"True, but in my opinion your father would welcome you back, whereas no meeting can ever again take place between you and Stanley."

"I do not desire it," said Mildred.

"Before I leave, I wish to say a word to you," remarked Sister Aline. "If you are dissatisfied, go back to your father. I am certain he will receive you. Lead a new life. Once I was as indifferent to devotion and acts of penitence as yourself, but now these are my greatest comfort. Your excellent father is most anxious that your life should change, and I believe his prayers will prevail."

Just then Darcy entered the room, and absolutely started when he beheld Sister Aline.

"What! you here again?" he cried.

"Yes, I have been trying to prevail on Mildred to return to her father, who is still dangerously ill."

"I am very sorry for him," said Darcy. "But what can I do?"

"Send back his daughter."

"He would not take her back, were I to send her," said Darcy.

"You are mistaken," replied Sister Aline. "He has been looking for her daily. He felt certain she would never remain with you."

"Tell my father I will never leave Captain Darcy," cried Mildred.

"Mr. Warburton will not believe that message," said Sister Aline.

"Say to Mr. Warburton, from me," observed Darcy, "that nothing shall induce me to give up his daughter. Circumstances, I hope, will enable me, before long, to marry her—and then we shall both be entirely happy. But think not you will prevail on Mildred to leave me and return. That she never will."

"Never!" cried Mildred. "I am grieved for my father, who is the kindest of men, but I have no pity for my husband. I have never loved him since I married him —nor has he loved me. His affections were fixed on Rose Hylton, and I hope he will marry her, should a divorce be obtained. It must have been evident to all—even to my father, I should think—

that ours was never likely to prove a happy union. We were scarcely ever together. Stanley set out every morning, immediately after breakfast, for Brereton, where he remained during the day, while I amused myself as I best could at Beaucliffe. But I was not satisfied with this kind of life, though I bore it for some time without a murmur. I became a prey to the most terrible ennui. At last an accident brought Captain Darcy to the house, and I obtained a new interest. He made himself agreeable to me, and I began to like him—far better than Stanley. He perceived this, and paid me still greater attention, and I was soon fast bound to him by love's chains. Lady Talmash tried to check this growing attachment, but it was already far beyond her power. However, she was resolved that he should leave the house, and after an interview had taken place between them he departed. But though he was driven from Beaucliffe I heard constantly from him. The thoughts of quitting my husband gave me little pain, for by this time I had lost even the slight regard I entertained for him, but I seriously dreaded leaving my

dear father, as I knew how deeply my flight would grieve him—and more than once my departure was postponed. Eventually it was settled that I should start from Brereton, while Darcy was to wait for me on horseback, about five miles off on the road to Chester. On that morning, I believe, I appeared light and unconcerned, but I never felt more anxious. Just before I was about to start I went behind my father and kissed his hand, but in a careless manner, so as not to attract any particular attention. Stanley, I felt sure, would give me no trouble. Nor did he. He scarcely said a word to me that morning. Such was our farewell. I have no regard for Brereton, and I care not if I never behold the place again, but I gave one look at the house, as I dashed through the gates. I then galloped off—not that I feared pursuit—but I wanted excitement—and didn't stop till I found Darcy."

"And never was I so delighted as when I beheld you," he said. "I had been waiting there nearly two hours, full of uneasiness. Your appearance put all fears to flight, and we then went on to Chester."

"You will not, I conclude, return with me to your father," said Sister Aline to Mildred.

"I cannot," she replied.

"Nor can I expect you, after the explanation you have given me. Not till now did I know what you had sacrificed on quitting your father."

"She has sacrificed a large fortune," said Darcy. "If you return to Beaucliffe tell Mr. Warburton he ought to make a fresh settlement. The present settlement will merely benefit Stanley Brereton."

"Tell him to wait till he ascertains whether a divorce can be obtained for us," said Mildred; "and act accordingly. My father, I am sure, will never knowingly do an injustice."

"I will tell him exactly what you have told me, and leave him to decide," replied Sister Aline.

"That is all I ask," said Mildred. "My conduct, I feel, must appear dreadful to my dear father. But implore him to put the best construction he can upon it. I was wretched, though he did not perceive it."

"I cannot undertake to aid you much,"

said Sister Aline; "but I will lay before your father all you have told me concerning your unhappiness in your married state, and leave him to judge. Should he wish me to write to you, I will write. Otherwise not. I do not desire to take any part in an affair of this kind."

"I shall for ever bless you, if you can obtain my father's forgiveness for me," cried Mildred.

"I make no promise, but I will use my best efforts to accomplish that end. Farewell!"

Mildred would gladly have detained her, for she had much more to say; but Darcy seemed to think that the interview had lasted quite long enough. He therefore conducted Sister Aline with the utmost respect to the entrance of the hotel, and would have placed her on board the steamboat, had she desired it.

## XVII.

### A CHANGE TAKES PLACE IN MR. WARBURTON'S FEELINGS TOWARDS HIS DAUGHTER.

Mr. Warburton was not quite so well as he had been when Sister Aline came back to Beaucliffe. The fever had returned, and brought with it rather more mental excitement. Under these circumstances she had to be careful what she told him.

But next day he became much calmer, and she then informed him of her interview with Mildred at Boulogne.

He listened to all she had to tell with the deepest interest, but seemed much vexed and disappointed that his daughter would not return.

"She does not deem her conduct so culpable as you and her husband do, sir,"

she said; "and thinks that many and great excuses might be made for her. Amongst others, she affirms that she has long lost all affection for Stanley, and asserts that he is equally indifferent to her. She likewise declares that neglect on his part made her wretched at the commencement of her married life, though she uttered no complaint."

"I am truly grieved to hear it," said the squire. "But I believed she loved him."

"I must next inform you," said Sister Aline, "that the fugitives hope to obtain a divorce, and marry."

"I have no desire that they should marry," said the squire, sternly.

"They have no option," said Sister Aline. "Do not place a fresh obstacle in their path."

"Should she marry Darcy, I will never behold her again," said the squire.

"Do not make that declaration, sir," rejoined Sister Aline. "Do not cut away your daughter's sole chance of happiness, which lies in a union with Darcy. Rather aid it."

"I cannot do that," said the squire.

"But I will not oppose it. The divorce is certain."

"In that case, the marriage will immediately follow," said Sister Aline, "and then matters will be set completely right."

"Not completely," rejoined the squire, despondingly. "She will never be the same again."

"She will be happy if you will forgive her. Why condemn her to constant unhappiness, when a few kind words from you would relieve her from a weight of anxiety? I believe you have as good a heart as man ever possessed, and certainly no one ever loved a daughter better than you have loved Mildred. That she has deceived you may excite your displeasure, but will not, I am sure, harden your heart altogether against her. To you it would be no satisfaction that she should suffer—nor would you desire that she should be punished as society punishes its offenders. For your own sake, as well as for hers, I entreat you to forgive her. I deeply regret the pain and anxiety you will have to endure while settling the matter—but you will feel very differently when all is over."

"You move me very much by what you

say," rejoined Mr. Warburton, "and I believe the course you recommend will be the best. All my anger against my daughter has subsided, and in its place are nothing left but kindly feelings."

"I am glad that such a change has taken place," said Sister Aline; "and I will write to inform Mildred that you have become more tranquil. Shall I tell her that you may possibly write to her, ere long?"

"No," he replied. "As yet, I fear, I am not equal to the task. But tell her to think of me with kindness—always with kindness. That we shall meet again, ere long, I do not doubt. But whether I can receive her as heretofore, I cannot say. I must consult with some of the ladies now staying in the house."

"They will counsel you not to receive her—of that I am certain," said Sister Aline.

"I am afraid so," he replied.

"But you need not be governed by what they say."

"I haven't the courage to act otherwise."

"Not where your daughter is concerned?"

"I musn't get blamed again. I will

have an immediate consultation with Lady Starkey, and will let you know what she says. I hope you will remain here for a few days."

"Willingly, if I can do good."

"Of that there can be no doubt," said the squire.

Just then the door opened, and Lady Starkey and Lady Talmash entered.

"Sister Aline will remain here for a week," said the squire to Lady Talmash. "Be so good as to find her a room."

"With the greatest pleasure," replied the other. "Pray come with me."

As soon as they were gone, Mr. Warburton begged Lady Starkey to be seated.

"I want the benefit of your ladyship's advice," he said. "I have just received a message from my daughter. She means to marry Darcy if she can obtain a divorce, which I doubt not will be accomplished. She is likewise desirous to return here after her marriage."

"What!" cried Lady Starkey, quite startled. "Take up her abode once more with you? That is quite out of the question However your inclinations may prompt you, you cannot do it."

"I felt so," replied the squire. "But before sending a positive refusal, I wished to consult your ladyship."

"Mildred can never expect to re-enter this house," said Lady Starkey, gravely. "She has forfeited all right to do so."

"True," groaned the squire; "but it would be such a comfort to me. I don't know how I shall be able to get on without her. I have been thinking it over during my illness, and have come to the conclusion that unless Mildred is with me I must leave Beaucliffe. What can I do here by myself?"

"Oh, you can always get plenty of agreeable people to stay with you."

"But that won't exactly satisfy me," cried the squire. "No one will replace her."

"You fancy so just now," said Lady Starkey; "but you'll become reconciled to her loss in time. At all events, you must submit, since there's no help—for you can't have her again. Were she to return, nobody would come to the house, so you would dwell in solitude. No, you must abandon that idea. Fortunately for yourself you have several experienced lady-friends, who will take the management

of your house if you desire it. I myself shall be delighted to give assistance for a few months, and then my post can be taken up by Lady Talmash or some one else."

"Your ladyship is very kind. I am sure I am infinitely indebted to you."

"I feel for you very much, Mr. Warburton," she said. "The plan I have suggested is the best that occurs to me, and I am quite certain I can make your house very comfortable. But you mustn't think of having Mildred and Darcy here. That will never do."

"Very well," replied the squire, with a look of resignation.

## XVIII.

### WHAT PASSED BETWEEN STANLEY AND ROSE.

Rose took no part in the consultations now going on as to the future management of Beaucliffe. She neither wished to interfere with her aunt nor Lady Talmash, but was quite ready to offer Stanley all the consolation in her power.

It was evident that Mildred's flight had awakened fresh hopes in her breast, and she could now look forward with a pleasureable expectation to the future.

Though Stanley continued to reside at Beaucliffe, he spent the greater part of each day at Brereton, and constantly talked over matters with Rose and his mother,

either in the library or while walking on the lawn.

He spoke of himself as an injured husband, and complained very bitterly of the manner in which his wife had left him; but his mother told him he might think himself exceedingly fortunate in having got rid of her, and Rose's looks expressed the same opinion.

"It may not be very flattering to your vanity that Mildred should run away from you," said Mrs. Brereton. "But it is very well she has gone, for you could never have been happy with her."

"Perhaps not," he replied. "And though I my reconcile myself to her loss, I shall never be satisfied till I have called Darcy to account."

"He is said to be a dead shot," remarked Rose. "Why give him a chance of killing you?"

"I cannot otherwise avenge my honour," said Stanley.

"Then leave it unavenged," rejoined his mother. "This infamous Darcy has already killed my brother. He must not in like manner rob me of my son."

"In my opinion you will needlessly

expose yourself by challenging him," said Rose. "You are not called upon to meet him."

"I think differently," said Stanley.

"Dismiss these silly notions," rejoined his mother. "Darcy has really rendered you an important service—if you could only view it in the right light—and you ought to feel grateful to him. Leave him alone, I say. My chief anxiety is about poor dear Mr. Warburton, whose recovery seems not yet quite assured."

"Oh! yes, I think it is," said Stanley.

"How Mildred could leave such an indulgent father I cannot understand," continued Mrs. Brereton.

"Nor I," added Rose. "She can have no real feeling. Should Mr. Warburton die, she will never be free from remorse."

"A woman without feeling is not likely to be troubled with remorse," said Mrs. Brereton.

And she left them, and passed through one of the French windows into the library.

Rose would have followed, but Stanley detained her.

"Don't go in just yet," he observed. "I have something to say to you."

"What is it?" she asked, looking as if she almost guessed what was coming.

"Do you think you could be happy as my wife?" he said. "It won't do to make a second mistake."

"I'm quite sure I could," she replied. "I should be the happiest person possible were I allowed to indulge my regard for you."

"Ere long, I trust, the sole obstacle to our union will be removed," said Stanley.

"Heaven grant it may!" she exclaimed. "With such a prospect, why not tranquillise yourself? Above all, leave Darcy alone. Depend upon it, he will be sufficiently punished by the partner of his flight."

"I have no doubt of it," said Stanley.

"The person to be pitied is Mr. Warburton," said Rose. "To him his daughter is a real loss. What he will do without her I cannot conceive."

"He will easily find a wife, if he wants one," replied Stanley. "There are two ladies now at Beaucliffe, either of whom would accept him."

"I shouldn't wonder," replied Rose. "But is he likely to choose one of them?"

"That I can't say," replied Stanley. "But now tell me, do you really like this house in all respects?"

"Yes, it exactly suits me. I feel I shall be perfectly happy here. I am very fond of your mother, and I think she likes me."

"I am sure she does," replied Stanley. "Under the circumstances, it is very fortunate that you agree so well together, since she must, of necessity, remain here."

"The house would lose one of its chief attractions if she were to quit it," said Rose. "To me she is a delightful companion, and I am always happy in her society. I am quite disposed to pay her all possible respect, and will do my best to please her. Nor will it be a difficult task. Already, I know something of her tastes, and can easily accommodate myself to them. She is fond of a quiet life, so am I. I like the country, quite as much as she does, and don't care much for town. I delight in a garden and all connected with it, so does she. Above all, this house

suits us both perfectly. I don't think we shall disagree on a single point."

"I'm sure you won't," replied Stanley. "Hitherto, my experience has been precisely the reverse. My mother has never been interfered with—for that I would not allow—but her tastes have rarely been consulted."

"Well, you shall have no complaint on that score," said Rose. "I look on this as a very charming house, but I have a few plans to suggest which I think may turn out improvements."

"Suggest them to my mother," said Stanley. "She will feel flattered. Ah, there she is at the library window. She has come back to look after us. I must give her some notion of our intentions respecting her."

Accordingly, he stepped towards the window, and told her what had just passed between him and Rose.

Mrs. Brereton seemed highly pleased by the information.

"Only perform half your promise," she said, smiling at Rose; "and I shall be perfectly content."

"Depend upon it—if ever I have the

opportunity—I will perform all," replied the young lady earnestly.

"Then, indeed, Brereton is sure to be a cheerful house," said the elderly lady.

Mrs. Brereton's regard for Rose had already become strong affection. She discovered in her so many suitable qualities that she could not but rejoice that Stanley had chosen so well, and only hoped that their union might not be long delayed.

## XIX.

### WILL ROSE BE THE FUTURE MISTRESS OF BRERETON?

For reasons previously explained, neither Mrs. Brereton nor Rose had seen Mr. Warburton since the commencement of his illness.

But an urgent message was now sent by him through Stanley, begging them to come to Beaucliffe; and they at once responded to the invitation, and found him looking much better than they expected.

He came down to the drawing-room, accompanied by Lady Starkey, and appeared particularly pleased to see Rose. He asked her how she liked Brereton, and

when she replied "Better than any other old house she had ever seen," he said, "Strange! Mildred could not bear the place. How her dislike to it originated, I cannot imagine, but she never would pass a night there."

"I think it charming," rejoined Rose, "and shall be very sorry to leave it."

"Then why leave it?" said the squire. "Why not remain now you are there?"

Rather puzzled, Rose only replied by a slight laugh.

"I hope she will stay with us as long as she can," said Mrs. Brereton.

"When I came to Brereton with my aunt," said Rose, "I did not expect to remain so long, but great changes have taken place."

"True," replied the squire, "and may be followed by others. I should not be at all surprised if a new mistress were found for the house."

"She has not yet been announced," said Mrs. Brereton.

"Well, understand that the young lady, who has already been spoken of, is perfectly agreeable to me," said the squire.

"I have heard a rumour," said Lady Starkey; "and as I am naturally very much interested in the question, I can only hope it is true."

"Depend upon it, your ladyship shall receive early information," said Mrs. Brereton. "But at present, as I have just said the announcement is premature."

During this talk, Rose blushed deeply, but did not utter a word.

"You must not be offended with me, dear Mrs. Brereton," said Lady Starkey. But I hope you will satisfy my curiosity on this point. Is my niece to be the future mistress of Brereton?"

"What shall I say?" remarked Mrs. Brereton to Rose.

"Nothing," replied the young lady. "Whenever he thinks proper, Stanley will make a formal communication on the subject. Till then, silence must be observed."

"But he has given me a hint," said Lady Starkey.

"And me, too," added the squire. "Indeed, he has done more. He has consulted me on the subject, and as my opinion was favourable, there was no need of secresy.

I highly approve of the plan, and I think nothing better could be done, under the circumstances. In fact it was to tell you this that I sent for you both. The plan, I repeat, has my entire approval."

"And mine, too," said Lady Starkey, emphatically. "I have such a high opinion of my niece, that I am confident Stanley will be happy with her."

"Oh! thank you, dearest aunt, for what you say," cried Rose, springing up and kissing her. "It is the greatest satisfaction to be able to speak freely of this affair, but I did not think I could do so."

"I deemed it best to come to a clear understanding," observed Mr. Warburton; "and to convince you that I am really anxious for Stanley's happiness. You must control your impatience, and wait till matters can be arranged; but rest satisfied there will be no opposition on my part."

"I never doubted it, sir," said Mrs. Brereton; "and I only regret that you should have been placed by circumstances in such a painful position."

Just then, Stanley entered the room, and

instantly perceived that a satisfactory explanation had taken place.

"I am infinitely obliged to you, sir," he said, addressing the squire. "Few fathers, who have lost a dearly-beloved daughter, would act as you have done."

"I desire to make all allowances," said Mr. Warburton. "Understand clearly that you will have no needless opposition from me; but that, so far as I can, I will assist you. And now I must bid you adieu, for, as you are aware, I am still not very strong. Come over to Beaucliffe whenever you are disposed. I shall always be glad to see you."

With this he quitted the room, attended by Lady Starkey.

"I must say I am filled with admiration and astonishment at Mr. Warburton's conduct," said Mrs. Brereton, as soon as he was gone. "I did not believe he could act thus. He seems to put himself entirely out of the question."

"He really wishes to act justly," said Stanley. "What he suffers from the terrible calamity that has befallen him, no one knows but himself. He makes no com-

plaint. But it is certain he will never receive his daughter again."

"You think so?" said Rose.

"I am quite sure of it. Lady Starkey has extorted a promise from him to that effect, and so has Lady Talmash."

## XX.

### WHICH IS THE FAVOURITE?

Mr. Warburton continued to improve, and might now be considered as almost well.

He no longer breakfasted in bed, or in his dressing-room, but down stairs, with Lady Starkey and Lady Talmash, who kept him as cheerful as they could.

Though merely manifested in trifles, a little jealousy had sprung up between the two ladies, both of whom paid the amiable old gentleman the greatest attention, but neither could declare herself the favourite, for if one gained a step the other quickly overtook her.

The truth is the squire liked them both

pretty nearly equally, though perhaps Lady Starkey had most influence with him, and occasionally he sat a quarter of an hour longer with her during breakfast than he did with Lady Talmash.

On such occasions they generally talked about Mildred, and the squire would then pour forth his griefs into her sympathising bosom.

"Now I have lost my daughter," he said, "I sometimes think I should be happier if I had a constant female companion."

"I have no doubt you would, sir," replied Lady Starkey. "You require some one to cheer you."

"I dare say your niece, who, it is to be hoped, will eventually become Stanley's wife, and who is really a most amiable person, would do her best to make me comfortable."

"But she cannot always be here," said Lady Starkey. "Stanley is quite resolved to keep up Brereton, when he marries again. I really think you cannot do better than follow his example. Be sure you will be happier and more comfortable as a husband than you have ever been as a father."

"I really begin to think so," said the squire. "But I must not marry too young a wife."

"No! no! That will never do," rejoined Lady Starkey. "Such a choice might not lead to a happy result. You want an agreeable and lady-like companion, of middle age."

"Precisely," said the squire. "And such a one I have in my eye at the present moment."

Lady Starkey looked quite confused.

"How am I to understand you, Mr. Warburton? she asked.

"I hope I have said nothing to offend your ladyship?" he rejoined.

"Offend me! Oh no!" she replied, in a very bland and encouraging tone. "But perhaps you will give me a little time for consideration?"

"As much as your ladyship pleases," said the squire. "I wouldn't hurry you for the world. A great deal has to be considered—age, temper, tastes, and a variety of other things. But still you know something about me."

"Quite enough to satisfy me of your worth and goodness of heart," replied Lady

Starkey. "And pray believe, dear Mr. Warburton, if I hesitate, it is because——"

"Don't say another word," said the squire. "It is quite natural you should hesitate. But I will relieve you at once of the difficulty. Don't think any more of the proposition just made to you."

Before Lady Starkey could make any reply the door opened and Lady Talmash came in.

"Some other time," said Lady Starkey, rising and quitting the room.

"Why is she in such a hurry?" inquired Lady Talmash. "I seem to have come rather *mal à propos*. It almost looks as if you had been making her an offer of your hand, and had been refused—though that's very unlikely."

"Unlikely as it seems," said the squire; "it's the fact."

"Well, I couldn't have believed it," cried her ladyship, in amazement. "I wonder she could be insensible to your merits."

"I am too old for her, I suppose," said the squire, with a sigh. "It's great presumption, I own, on my part, to propose to such a fine woman."

"Well, don't despair," said Lady Talmash, with a smile. "She's not the only fine woman to be found. You can't be violently in love with her?"

"I didn't pretend to be in love with her at all," said the squire. "I only want an amiable and ladylike companion, and she rather led me to believe she would like to be mistress of Beaucliffe."

"No doubt she would," rejoined Lady Talmash. "And I'm quite astonished she should have thrown away the chance."

"Well, now, just tell me how you yourself, would behave under similar circumstances?" said the squire.

"I can't tell," she replied. "Ask a direct question and I'll give you a precise answer. You may be jesting all this time. I confess it looks like it. And judging from her otherwise inexplicable conduct, Lady Starkey seems to have entertained the same opinion."

At this juncture Lady Starkey returned.

She seemed rather put out on finding Lady Talmash still with the squire, and was by no means pleased by her exulting look.

"I have considered what you said to me

just now, before I left the room, sir," she said.

"Oh! I thought that was all at an end," exclaimed the squire.

"How at end?" cried Lady Starkey, in astonishment.

"In other words, that the offer was declined," said the squire.

"No such thing," rejoined the lady. "A short time was allowed me for consideration, and I have now returned to say that I accept."

"Accept!" exclaimed the squire, in dismay. "But it's too late. I thought you had declined, and acted accordingly."

"You don't mean to say you have made another proposal since I left the room."

"Undoubtedly I have."

"And been accepted?"

"Ask Lady Talmash. She can give you the best response."

"Most certainly," said the lady appealed to. "I meant to accept him."

"You have acted most improperly, sir," said Lady Starkey, angrily. "I asked for a little time for consideration, which you most readily granted, and on my returning

after a few minutes' absence, during which I had determined to accept you, I find you have made a second offer. Is such conduct that of a gentleman?" she added, regarding him fixedly.

"It has been a complete misapprehension on my part," replied the squire in an apologetic tone. "I certainly thought you *had* rejected me."

"I don't see how that was possible, sir," said Lady Starkey. "But even suppose there has been a mistake, which it is difficult to imagine, you must have been in a most desperate hurry."

"I am bound to say that Mr. Warburton told me at once that he had just been refused," said Lady Talmash, who could scarcely refrain from laughing.

"I was decidedly under that impression," said the squire. "Cannot you arrange the matter between yourselves? I shall be perfectly content with either."

"Mine is the prior claim," said Lady Starkey, "and I see no reason whatever for relinquishing it."

"And most certainly I shan't give up mine," said Lady Talmash.

"Then it seems I must have two wives,"

groaned the squire. "Can't you offer a suggestion?" he said to Lady Starkey.

"If I did so," replied her ladyship, "I would recommend Lady Talmash to retire."

"That would be a concession I am not likely to make to your ladyship," rejoined the other. "I don't desire to praise myself, but for several months of her married life, while Mildred resided beneath her father's roof, I have managed matters for her—and, I believe, entirely to Mr. Warburton's satisfaction."

"Entirely," he repeated, "entirely."

"Then since he entertains such an opinion of me," pursued her ladyship, "is it not probable he would desire to make me his wife?"

"Not merely probable, but certain," said the squire. "I consider myself under the greatest obligation to Lady Talmash for her almost maternal kindness to my daughter, and am most anxious to repay her."

"Your ladyship hears what Mr. Warburton says?" observed Lady Talmash, sarcastically.

"Yes, but that has nothing whatever to do with the matter. Mr. Warburton ought to feel very grateful to your ladyship—and

does so, no doubt—but that is no reason why he should make you an offer of marriage—especially without waiting for an answer to a previous proposal. I hold him to his word. Can he deny having given it?"

"No, no, I don't do that," replied the luckless squire. "But I really think, under the circumstances, your ladyship ought to set me free."

"I can't," she rejoined.

"Won't, you mean," he returned. "Well, then I must make another appeal to you," he said to Lady Talmash.

"I'm inexorable," she replied, shaking her head.

"What's to be done?" cried the squire. "Talk the matter over! Perhaps you may come to an amicable conclusion. I'll leave you together."

And he hurried out of the room.

Left alone, the two ladies acted upon his advice. Instead of saying sharp things to each other, they seemed disposed to hold a little friendly discourse.

"Don't be angry with me, dearest Lady Starkey, if I have inadvertently thwarted your plans," said Lady Talmash. "But I

really thought from the squire's manner that you *had* refused him—and consequently, that you would not mind what I might do. If you really *are* serious, and desire to have charge of him, I'll give him up at once."

"A thousand thanks for your consideration, dearest Lady Talmash, but, perhaps, I'm happier as I am. I have a nice house in town, and a sufficient income, and with Beaucliffe to manage, and Mr. Warburton, who I fear will henceforward be an invalid, to look after, I might have more to do than I should like. So I won't stand in your way."

"What your ladyship says makes me feel perfectly easy," replied Lady Talmash. "A marriage with Mr. Warburton is of far more consequence to one of limited income than it can be to a person of good property like your ladyship. I shall therefore accept him."

"And apart from any consideration of fortune, you will do quite right in accepting him," replied Lady Starkey. "Mr. Warburton is a most excellent man, and will make you a most indulgent husband. My only fear has been, that in spite of all

we can say to him, he might receive Mildred back. You must take care of that."

"Depend upon it, I will," replied Lady Talmash. "And that reminds me that a few days ago Sister Aline received a communication from her, the contents of which seem to give the poor thing a good deal of uneasiness. She didn't say that anything had happened—but I almost feared so from her manner. I believe she has gone to Boulogne to make inquiries. No, she is still here, I find," she added, as the personage in question was ushered into the room by a footman.

## XXI.

### SISTER ALINE BRINGS ILL NEWS.

SISTER ALINE raised her veil as she entered the room, and her features looked even paler than usual. From her manner it was evident that she brought ill news, and both ladies regarded her anxiously.

"Have you seen Mildred?" inquired Lady Talmash.

"Yes, I have seen her," replied the sister; "and I grieve to say circumstances have occurred that have compelled my immediate return here."

"What circumstances?" cried Lady Starkey. "Pray don't keep us in suspense! Is she still with Captain Darcy, at Boulogne?"

"No, she has left him——"

"Left him?" exclaimed both ladies.

"For ever," rejoined Sister Aline.

"What has occasioned their separation?" inquired Lady Starkey.

"A violent quarrel," replied the sister. "Very unpleasant things, I grieve to say, have passed between them—such as will for ever prevent them from coming together again."

"This is bad news indeed!" said Lady Talmash, glancing at Lady Starkey. "I am afraid it will kill poor Mr. Warburton."

"I hastened to bring him the earliest intelligence of the event that he might know how to act under the painful circumstances," said Sister Aline.

"I am of the same opinion as Lady Talmash," said Lady Starkey. "Unless the greatest care is taken I fear the intelligence may be fatal to him."

"As yet, I have only spoken to Stanley, whom I saw at Brereton on my way here," said Sister Aline. "He advised the utmost caution, and his fears for Mr. Warburton are almost as great as your own."

"Was not Stanley surprised at these unlooked-for tidings?" said Lady Starkey.

"He was almost overcome," replied Sister Aline. "But he succeeded in maintaining his firmness. He made many inquiries about her, but I gave him no information."

"And I suppose you intend to treat us in like manner?" remarked Lady Talmash.

"I am prohibited from answering certain questions," said the sister.

"Nor do we desire to ask them," said Lady Starkey; "except that on all accounts, we should wish to be satisfied that the unhappy lady will not come here."

"At present she has no such intention," replied Sister Aline. "Nor will she do so at any time, unless compelled by circumstances."

"Then it must be our business to prevent her," said Lady Starkey. "We cannot allow Mr. Warburton's valuable life to be jeopardised by any unwarrantable intrusion on her part."

"Ought the visit of a daughter to be described as an unwarrantable intrusion?" said Sister Aline.

"She has forfeited all right to be considered as a daughter," said Lady Talmash. "We look upon her offences as aggravated by her subsequent conduct, and should she attempt to return, the doors will be closed against her."

"Let her not be deceived in this respect," added Lady Starkey. "She will certainly be so treated. Besides, she will inflict still greater pain on her unhappy father."

"Alas! alas! have you no compassion for the penitent?" said Sister Aline, in piteous accents.

"How know we that she *is* penitent?" said Lady Starkey. "All we know is, that she left her husband with a lover, and has now quarrelled with the lover and left *him*."

"She is utterly unworthy of consideration," said Lady Talmash. "Appeal to the injured husband, if you think proper, and try to move him; but leave alone the suffering father, or if ill ensues it will rest on your own head."

At this juncture Mr. Warburton returned,

and was greatly surprised by finding Sister Aline in the room.

Awed by the menancing looks of the two ladies, the sister uttered not a word.

As she continued to maintain silence, the squire began to question her.

"Have you received any tidings from Mildred?" he said.

"I have seen her," she replied.

"Where, in Heaven's name?" he inquired.

"I am not at liberty to answer that question," she rejoined.

"But you can tell me where she is. Is she at Boulogne?"

"No."

The reluctance with which she answered convinced the squire that something was intentionally kept from him, and he was determined to have a direct answer.

"Then they have left Boulogne," he said.

"Darcy is still there, but not your daughter."

"Have they separated?" cried the squire, trembling with anxiety.

The two ladies looked at Sister Aline in the vain hope of checking her.

"You must not ask me that question, sir," she said.

"Your evasive answer satisfies me that I have guessed the truth," he cried, looking still more excited. "In pity, relieve my anxiety, and tell me precisely what has happened. Perhaps, you think I cannot bear it. But you are mistaken. I would rather know the worst, than remain in this state of dreadful suspense."

"There is no occasion to distress yourself thus, sir," interposed Lady Starkey. "Nothing dreadful has happened. Your daughter has committed an imprudence, no doubt—but that might be expected from her. Had it been possible, we would have kept it from your knowledge—at least, for the present."

"It seems that I am constantly destined to suffer," groaned the squire, sinking into a chair. "Can you give me any consolation?" he added to Lady Talmash.

"I would advise you to bestow no thought upon the matter," she replied. "Dwell upon it as little as you can."

"Darcy and Mildred have quarrelled and separated, so you say," cried the squire,

looking at Sister Aline. "Is there aught more you have to tell?"

"Much," she replied. "But I am not allowed to tell it."

"Who prevents you?"

"Mildred herself," she rejoined, looking rather frightened.

"But I insist on knowing all," he cried, springing to his feet, and seizing her hand. "Speak out! I *will* know the truth."

"Am I free to speak?" said Sister Aline to Lady Talmash.

"Certainly," replied the other.

"Then the quarrel arose from jealousy —jealousy on the part of Mildred. A letter fell into her hands, from which she discovered that he had been unfaithful. She bitterly reproached him, but he treated her reproaches with contempt, and told her she might leave him, if she chose. 'Are you tired of me?' she asked. 'It may be so,' was his reply. 'Then you shall never behold me again,' she rejoined. And she left him with the fixed determination of carrying out her threat."

"Alas!" ejaculated the squire. "Has it come to this? So soon! so soon!"

"Nothing else could be expected," said Lady Talmash. "In my opinion, Darcy did not really love her—though she believed so. He had boasted that he would take her away from her husband, and he kept his word. Every art familiar to one so unscrupulous was employed to accomplish his purpose."

"Again, I feel how greatly I have been to blame for exposing her to him!" ejaculated the squire.

"Do not torture yourself with these needless self-reproaches, sir," said Lady Talmash. "Nothing you could have done would have saved her."

"There you are wrong," rejoined Sister Aline. "Her father was the only person who could have saved her, but he shut his eyes to the danger."

"I did not discern it," exclaimed the squire. "I had perfect faith in my daughter. Even when you cautioned me, I could not believe her capable of any imprudence."

"Do not make any further mistake," said Lady Starkey. "Your firmness may again be severely tried."

"Then I must pray you to give me your support," cried the unhappy father. "What shall I do if she appeals to me to receive her?"

"Unhesitatingly reject her," said Lady Starkey.

"Oh! no, no, no!" implored Sister Aline. "Reject her not. Save her from further danger."

"If I thought I *could* save her I would not hesitate," exclaimed the squire.

"You will make a greater mistake than any you have yet committed if you take her back," said Lady Talmash in a warning voice. "Shut your heart against her. She does not deserve pity."

"Heed not what others say—be guided by your better feelings, sir," said Sister Aline. "Your heart prompts you to take her back. Obey its impulses!"

The poor squire made an ineffectual attempt to reply, but fell back in his chair, half suffocated by emotion.

By the time he had recovered, Stanley had arrived, and assisted to take him to his own room.

Sister Aline had to sustain some angry

remarks from the two ladies for her imprudence. But she bore their reproaches very meekly.

"I will never believe," she said, "that worthy Mr. Warburton will act unkindly."

## XXII.

### WHAT FOLLOWED MILDRED'S RETURN.

PLACING the squire in an easy-chair, and making him as comfortable as he could, Stanley left him to repose, thinking he might only excite him further, if he stopped to talk with him.

By-and-by the two ladies came into the room, but finding the old gentleman asleep, did not disturb him.

On awaking from a long slumber, which had completely calmed his nerves, what was the worthy gentleman's astonishment, and indeed dismay, to find a young lady watching beside him!

Could it be Mildred?

At first, he thought he must be dream-

ing, and doubted the evidence of his senses, but he soon became convinced it was really his daughter, and spoke to her in accents meant to be severe, but which, in reality, were tender and paternal.

"How is it I find you here?" he demanded.

By way of reply, she flung herself down before him, and embraced his knees.

He strove to maintain a stern demeanour, and thrust her back, but did not succeed.

Looking up with streaming eyes, and clasped hands, she implored his forgiveness.

The poor squire tried to avert his gaze, and shut his ears—but in vain. His quivering lips and trembling limbs betrayed his emotion.

"You ought not to have come here without permission," he said, "and permission would not have been granted you."

"I know it," she replied, in penitential tones. "But do not drive me hence till you have heard what I have to say. Ever since I left my dearest father with the perfidious wretch who induced me to fly with him, I have been miserable; and I rejoice at the rupture between us. In

venturing to come back to my old home I presume upon my dearest father's former love for me, which I feel sure cannot be entirely extinguished. I seek no reunion with Stanley. I know it is impossible—nor do I desire it. It would be a life of ceaseless upbraiding and reproach, which I ought to bear, but could not."

"I am sure you could not," said Mr. Warburton.

"What I would do were I so permitted," she continued, "would be to return privately to this house, and dwell here in perfect seclusion—unseen and unknown by the world."

"Nonsense," replied Mr. Warburton. "You would soon be tired of such a life, and would fly from me, as you have just flown from Darcy."

"Fear it not," she rejoined, earnestly. "I would never leave you again."

"So you persuade yourself now," rejoined her father, sadly. "But I know better. Apart, however, from all other considerations, such a scheme is utterly impracticable."

"Not so, dearest papa," she replied, rising from her kneeling posture, and

taking the seat beside him. "I need not remind you that at the end of the east wing of the mansion, there are three or four rooms which are rarely occupied; I could go there."

"But your presence would necessarily be known to the servants, if not to others," said Mr. Warburton, whose changed manner showed that his daughter's proposition had produced an effect on him.

"That will not matter if I do not appear," she rejoined. "I shall have Charlotte and another servant to attend on me. I am quite aware that Lady Starkey and Lady Talmash are staying here, and I know they are both very inquisitive. But they won't interfere with me unless I interfere with them; and as I shall carefully keep out of their way, I am not afraid."

"But there is Stanley!"

"You must tell him the truth, and if he objects to my presence—though he will never see me—you must persuade him to go to Brereton."

"Well, I don't know what to say," rejoined the squire, evidently yielding. "I don't like to refuse you; but if I accede to

the proposition, I am afraid I shall be very much blamed."

"Never mind, dearest papa, you will be acting most kindly."

The squire reflected for a few minutes, and then said:

"Give me your solemn promise that you will remain perfectly quiet, and never interfere in any way with Stanley."

"I give you my promise to that effect," she replied. "I don't think you will object to another request I have to make. I should like Sister Aline to have one of the rooms next me."

"I see no objection to that arrangement," said Mr. Warburton. "On the contrary, it seems advisable."

"Then I may understand that you consent to my return in this way, dearest papa?"

"I only consent on the conditions mentioned," replied the squire.

"And to which I unhesitatingly agree," she replied. "You are the kindest father in the world," she added, kissing his hand.

"The weakest, I fear, would be nearer the truth," he rejoined.

"May I go and take possession of my room?" she asked.

"Whenever you please," he replied. "But be cautious."

"I hope you won't think I have presumed too much on your kindness, when I tell you that before coming here I ordered Charlotte to wait for me at the further end of the gallery in the east wing."

"I will see you safely there," said the squire. "But stay! before we set out, let us make certain that the coast is clear."

Opening the chamber door, he looked out, but instantly drew back.

"Get behind those curtains—quick!" he cried. "Lady Starkey and Lady Talmash are coming here. They musn't find you."

Mildred instantly disappeared, and the two ladies after tapping at the door, entered the room.

"We have been rather uneasy about you, dear Mr. Warburton," said Lady Starkey.

"I am better," he replied. "I have had a couple of hours' sleep. But I don't feel equal to much talk."

"Would you rather we didn't stop?" asked Lady Talmash.

"Oh! no, no," cried the squire. "Ten minutes can do no harm. Pray sit down!"

"We've brought you some news that will surprise you," said Lady Starkey. "What do you think? There's a report below that your daughter has returned. I sincerely hope it's not true. Nothing more vexatious could happen. You would find it very difficult to get rid of her, but she musn't stay here."

"She musn't even enter the house," cried Lady Talmash. "You know my opinion on that point, and it's wholly unchanged. I scarcely think she will dare to show herself; but should she come, leave me to deal with her."

"How has the report originated, I wonder?" asked the squire.

"Some of the servants declare they have seen her," said Lady Talmash. "But I think it must be a mistake."

"I sincerely hope so," said Lady Starkey. "We shall escape a vast deal of unpleasantness."

"Well, dear ladies, I'm afraid I shan't be able to bear much more of this sort of talk," said the squire. "So if you are good

enough to stay with me, I must beg you to change the topic."

"Before doing so," said Lady Starkey, "let us know whether you wish any inquiries made as to the truth of the report?"

"No, no; let it rest," cried the squire.

But this seemed impossible, for just then Stanley made his appearance, and it was easy to perceive from his excited manner that he had heard the rumour and wanted to be satisfied about it.

Mr. Warburton regarded him with uneasiness—almost with terror.

"Is Mildred really come back?" cried Stanley. "I can't believe it."

"Ask the ladies," said the squire; "they have just brought me the tidings."

"We have been forbidden to say anything more on the subject," they both remarked.

"I'm sorry to disobey the orders," said Stanley, "but perhaps I may be excused under the circumstances. The report seems scarcely credible, still it may be true."

"May we speak?" cried the ladies.

"Say as little as you can," replied the squire, reluctantly.

"How has the report originated?" asked Stanley. "Surely it must have some foundation?"

"We cannot trace it to any other source more trustworthy than servants' talk," said Lady Talmash.

"Then most likely it's mere invention," rejoined Stanley, "and I shall attach no importance to it. But should it unhappily prove true, I shall be much grieved on your account, sir. For myself it won't matter, as I shall never exchange another word with her under any circumstances, and shall try to avoid her."

"I quite approve of your determination," said Mr. Warburton. "Act up to it, but I don't think she will trouble you. She shan't; if I can prevent her."

"That's as much as I can expect," rejoined Stanley.

And he marched out of the room, to the squire's great relief.

"Shall we see you at dinner, sir?" said the ladies, as they prepared to follow.

"Yes, if you promise not to torment me with any more of these silly stories," said the squire.

"Make yourself quite easy, sir," said Lady Starkey. "You shall hear nothing disagreeable, depend upon it."

As soon as they had taken their departure, Mildred came from her hiding-place, looking flushed with anger.

"I hate them both," she exclaimed. "I longed to tell them what I think of them."

"Let us go to your room without delay, or some fresh hindrance may occur," said the squire.

And looking cautiously forth, he called out:

"All right! Come on!"

Mildred promptly obeyed, and they walked quickly on till they came to a long gallery on the right, down which they hastened.

At the further end of this gallery stood a young female servant.

"There's Charlotte at her post," cried Mildred.

"Yes, I see her," replied the squire.

Charlotte had likewise perceived them, but did not quit her station.

As they approached she opened the door of a very pretty bedroom, completely furnished in the French style. The window

commanded a charming view of the garden.

"I've always thought I should like to have this room," said Mildred; "and now I've got my wish. I'm sure I shall be happy here."

"I hope and trust you may," rejoined the squire. "But you must not raise your expectations too high. The room looks very pleasant and cheerful, but you may find it dull."

"Sister Aline has the next room," said Charlotte. "Mine's the third."

"Go to it, then, for a few minutes," said Mildred.

And as the attendant departed she remarked to her father:

"I sent her away because I want to thank you again for your great kindness. Never shall I forget it, never!"

Mr. Warburton looked at her tenderly for a few minutes, and then said in his old affectionate manner:

"Whatever you want you shall have. Always send Charlotte to me when you have a request to make. It will never be refused."

"Thank you! thank you, dearest papa!"

she cried, throwing her arms round his neck and kissing him affectionately.

"Come and see me every day!" she implored, "if only for a couple of minutes. Promise me that!"

Looking far more cheerful than he had done for some time, her father gave the required promise.

## XXIII.

### THE DIVORCE IS ABANDONED.

It cannot be supposed that Mildred's return to Beaucliffe could be long kept secret; but by Mr. Warburton's wish no allusion whatever was made to it.

For nearly a week she remained a close prisoner in her room, and saw no one except her father and Sister Aline.

A great change had taken place in her character. Since her return, she had become exceedingly penitent and devout—was constantly engaged in prayer—and read only religious books. Her father was by no means displeased by the change, which he justly attributed to the earnest exhortations of Sister Aline.

He thought her penitence carried too far, and occasionally remonstrated with her on the long fasting she practised, but he did not absolutely prohibit it, as he thought it might prove beneficial in the end.

She had now become as strict in the private observance of her religious duties, as she had formerly been careless of them. Her great regret was that she could not attend church service, but this was impossible under present circumstances.

Sister Aline consoled her, by the assurance that after a certain amount of probation, she might devote herself entirely to Heaven.

The altered mode of life she had now adopted, the fasting and discipline she practised, had already affected her health and threatened seriously to injure it if continued. But though her father pointed this out to her, and she herself was conscious of it, she persisted in the same course.

Her beauty was as great as ever—but wholly different from what it had been—it was delicate, ethereal, almost saintly. So much touched was her father by her

expression that he could scarcely regard her without tears springing to his eyes.

But if no one else admired the change wrought in her character, Sister Aline did. Not improperly did she regard herself as the author of the good work; and though she perceived the danger to her friend's health, she would not desist from the task. "What matters it, if her soul be saved?" she thought.

When Mildred first took possession of the room she now occupied, she persuaded herself that she should spend a great deal of time in the garden, which could be easily reached by a back staircase. But such was not the case. She rarely left her own chamber, except for that of Sister Aline.

Then commenced their devotions, which were of long continuance, and occupied the whole of their time. Mr. Warburton could scarcely believe it, when he heard what they went through, though he was a frequent witness of their penitential practices.

One fine morning, the garden looked so delightful, that Mildred could not resist the temptation of taking a walk within it.

"How say you, sister?" she remarked.

"Shall we spend an hour among the trees?"

Sister Aline expressed her assent, upon which they went down the back staircase to the garden.

They were proceeding slowly along a retired walk, when Stanley suddenly came forth from an alley on the left. He started on beholding Mildred, but scarcely seemed surprised to meet her—proving that he must know she was in the house.

With but a cold salute he would have passed, but she seized hold of his hand, and held him so forcibly, that he could not tear himself away.

"Pray stop with me a moment," she said. "I will not detain you long."

He yielded to her request, but with a bad grace, and looked very stern. "What have you to say?" he demanded.

"Have you any pity for me?" she asked. "Can you forgive me?"

"All your entreaties will fail to move me," he rejoined. "You have sinned too deeply to be forgiven."

"Not so," rejoined Sister Aline. "I can

testify to her deep and sincere repentance. Dismiss her not thus harshly."

"She has acted so badly, and given me so much pain, that I cannot forgive her," said Stanley. "I hope never to meet her again—nor should I have done so now, if she had not placed herself in my path."

"It will cost you nothing more than a slight effort to pardon her," said Sister Aline; "and it will give her unspeakable relief. Be mercifnl! be merciful!"

"Say rather, 'Be not cruel!'" added Mildred.

"I do not desire to be cruel," said Stanley, "but how can you expect pity from me—you, who have never shown the slightest consideration for my feelings? Do not detain me longer! Let me pass!"

"Go, then," rejoined Mildred, stepping aside. "But hereafter you will regret your conduct."

"I have just said that I do not wish to be cruel," said Stanley; "and if you really are penitent, I forgive you—not for your own sake—but for your father's."

And he marched away, without once looking back.

"I thought he had more generosity in his nature," said Mildred. "Let us go back and pray that his heart may be turned."

On quitting Mildred and her companion, Stanley proceeded to the front of the house, where he found a little party, consisting of Lady Starkey, Lady Talmash, Mrs. Brereton, and Rose, playing lawn-tennis. The two latter had just come over from Brereton.

Mr. Warburton was looking on, but took no part in the game. When Stanley drew near he went to meet him.

"I wish you could see Mildred," he said. "I am very uneasy about her. She looks extremely ill."

"I have just accidentally met her in the back part of the garden," replied Stanley; "and I was really quite shocked by her altered appearance. I should be sorry to alarm you, but I confess I don't think she will live long."

"Such is my own opinion," said Mr. Warburton. "I have watched her carefully of late, and have come to that conclusion. She refuses medical advice. Under these circumstances I would appeal to you

not to proceed with your divorce. It will give me great pain, and she will not long trouble you."

"Since you make this touching appeal to me, sir, I cannot refuse," replied Stanley. "You need fear nothing more. I will write at once to stop all proceedings."

"Thank you, thank you!" said the squire, earnestly. "You won't regret your generosity. I shan't forget it."

"Darcy shan't escape," said Stanley, sternly. "I'm determined to punish him."

"Leave him for the present," rejoined Mr. Warburton. "We shall see how all goes on here."

"Is it your wish, sir, that I should leave Brereton?"

"I think you had better stay here for the present," replied Mr. Warburton.

"Your wishes shall be obeyed, sir," replied Stanley. "As far as I am concerned I would rather remain here, and poor Mildred does not interfere with me in the slighest degree."

"Stanley," said the squire, with an imploring look, "I hope you will forgive her. It will console her greatly, and I am sure she is sincerely penitent. I must go

and tell her that you have promised to abandon the divorce. I am sure it will be a great relief to her."

"Tell her, also, that I sincerely forgive her," said Stanley.

"Depend upon it, I will," replied the squire.

And he hastened towards the back staircase, with the intention of going to Mildred's room.

Mr. Warburton was struck by his daughter's sorrowful looks as he entered.

"I am afraid you are worse to-day," he said.

"No," she replied. "But I have just seen Stanley, who did not behave kindly to me."

"He has made amends for what he said to you; so pray think no more of it. You will be pleased to hear that he has agreed to abandon the divorce; so you need have no future anxiety about it."

"That is a great satisfaction to me," she replied, "and I am sure it will make you much easier."

"He also desired me to say that he sincerely forgives you the wrong you have done him."

"He refused me pardon when I met him in the garden; but since he has now granted it I am content. I can now die in peace."

"And now, my dear child," said the squire, "having fulfilled all I came to do, I shall take my departure. I do not think you will see me again before the morning, when, perhaps, I may have some news for you."

"I care little for news now, papa," she said; "and never look at a newspaper. I am now going into Sister Aline's room, and shall remain engaged in prayer with her for two or three hours. I shall then return to read, and shall not lay aside my book till midnight."

## XXIV.

### DARCY REAPPEARS.

Mildred and Sister Aline continued their devotions for full three hours; they next conversed for some time on religious topics; and then separated for the night.

On entering her own room, Mildred glanced around, not with the expectation of any discovery, but from habit, and the chance that something might have been left during her absence.

The room seemed entirely undisturbed. No one was in attendance, for Charlotte had retired to rest. Mildred took a taper, and sat down beside a small table.

She had not been there many minutes, when she heard a noise for which she could not account.

Raising her eyes, she perceived a tall personage, who had issued from some corner of the room, and now stood before her.

The person she beheld was Darcy. But how, or why he came there—except to annoy her—she could not conceive.

Never, since their separation, had she heard from him in any way. Why should he appear now? How did he know where she was lodged? How had he obtained admittance to the house?

For a few moments he did not speak, so she had plenty of time for reflection.

"Why have you come here to trouble me?" she asked. "I hoped we should never meet again."

"We parted in anger," he said. "I wished that we should have a few words together in peace and friendship. As I could not meet you elsewhere, I came here."

"Be brief in what you have to say," she rejoined. "When we parted at Boulogne, you hoped never to behold me again, and I certainly never expected to see you. You have no right whatever to come here—to my father's house. But

I will pardon the intrusion—though not a second time. Now, what is it you have to say?"

"Have you no look of love for me?" he asked.

"I never had any love for you; but I now detest you, and regard you as my worst enemy," she rejoined.

"You once loved me sufficiently to fly with me from your husband," he said.

"That was madness, not love," she rejoined.

"Listen to me for a few minutes," said Darcy. "Though we have begun very badly, we may get on better. I am sure you would be happier with me than you can possibly be here. I am as much in love with you as I was at first. Ever since you left me I have been longing to have you back. Will you fly with me a second time as soon as I can make the necessary arrangements?"

"I will sooner die," replied Mildred, in a determined tone. "Nor will I allow you to insult me by such a proposition. I have quitted you for ever, as I told you at the time, and nothing shall induce me

to return. So pray depart quietly, and if you do so I will endeavour to forgive the intrusion."

"Think the matter over," rejoined Darcy. "I will come again to-morrow evening at the same hour. Very probably you may have changed your mind."

"Be not deceived," she said. "Short as the time is since I left you, I am no longer the same. I desire to pass the brief remainder of my days in penitence and prayer. I seek to efface my sins—not to add to their number."

"I could not have believed in such a change, had I not seen it," said Darcy. "But this must be Sister Aline's work."

"Yes, she has saved me," replied Mildred. "Without her I should have been lost."

Just then the door opened, and Sister Aline came in.

She started on beholding Darcy, and a shudder passed over her frame.

"Darcy here!" she exclaimed. "The man of all others I most dread and dislike."

"He has been trying to persuade me to

fly with him again," said Mildred. "But he has received no encouragement from me, and I trust he will never intrude upon me again."

"Were I you, I would summon the household, and arrest him or drive him forth, be the consequences what they may," said Sister Aline.

"Should he present himself again, no consideration shall be shown him," said Mildred. "Nor should he escape now, if I did not fear for my father."

"I have been quite willing to withdraw," said Darcy, "and if any alarm is caused in the house it will not be my fault. I now bid you farewell for ever," he said, addressing Mildred. "The reception you have given me is such that I shall never present myself before you under any circumstances."

"So much the better," said Sister Aline. "That is what we both desire. Now, listen to me, Captain Darcy. Should Mildred's health, which has not been good of late, become dangerously affected, this shall form no excuse for another visit from you."

"It shall not," he replied. "But I did not know she was suffering."

"She has been suffering in health ever since she left Boulogne."

"I am sorry to hear it," replied Darcy. "But I repeat she shall have no further annoyance of any kind from me. Farewell."

"I am glad he has gone," said Mildred. "I wonder how he came here. I do not think Charlotte would have admitted him into the house."

"Oh! no. I'll answer for her," replied Sister Aline.

"Let us go and speak to her."

So they went to her room, and told her what had occurred. Mildred's doubts were quickly dispelled by her manner.

On quitting the room into which he had ventured, Darcy descended the back staircase, and issued forth into the garden. But he had not taken many steps when two persons, who appeared to be on the look-out for him, came up.

It was a bright moonlight night, and he could easily perceive that the foremost of these persons was Stanley. The other seemed a man-servant—but he did not remain, and ran towards the house.

"Hold! sir," cried Stanley, planting

himself before Darcy, "I cannot allow you to pass till you have explained your business here."

"Since you are attended by the very person who enabled me to enter the house, and conducted me to a certain room, you cannot require to be told what business brought me here. I came to see a certain lady. I have seen her—seen her for the last time—of that I give you my word. Now, will you allow me to pass?"

"No," replied Stanley. "I have not done with you; I must learn the business that brought you here before I allow you to depart. Did you come by the lady's sanction? By her invitation?"

"I cannot say that I did," replied Darcy. "I wished to ascertain her feelings on certain points—in a word, I wished to learn from her own lips whether she was willing to return to me."

"Ah! you come to make that inquiry?" cried Stanley, scarcely able to repress his rage.

"The passion I felt for her at first had revived in full force," replied Darcy, "and I would willingly have taken her again, if she would have returned to me. But you may be

pleased to learn that she resolutely refused to accede to my wishes, and expressed her deep remorse and regret at the past. During the latter part of our brief interview, Sister Aline was present. We parted with the fixed determination never to meet again. Are you satisfied with my explanation?"

"I do not doubt its accuracy," replied Stanley, haughtily. "But I have no remark to make upon it."

"Mildred and I have now parted for ever," said Darcy. "I shall never pay her another secret visit. I find she has become a devotee—though I should never have anticipated it, and should be sorry to interfere with her soul's welfare. Can I give any further explanation, sir?"

"I require none," replied Stanley. "But I have not yet done. I have an account to arrange with you."

"When you please, sir," replied Darcy; "I am always ready to settle it."

"Where shall we meet?" said Stanley.

"We cannot meet safely in England," replied the other. "I propose, therefore, that the encounter shall take place at Boulogne or Dieppe."

"I have a recollection connected with the latter place that recommends it to me," said Stanley.

"Then Dieppe be it," replied Darcy. "We will meet there a week hence, if it suits you?"

"It suits me perfectly," replied Stanley. "I will come the day before, and bring a couple of friends with me. Stay, I may perhaps meet my uncle's friend, the Comte de Clairvaux"

"You will be sure to hear of him at the Hôtel Royal or the Casino," said Darcy.

"No, I will not trust to chance," said Stanley; "I will bring another friend with me."

"As you please," replied Darcy.

At this juncture a sound was heard at the front of the house, proving that the alarm had been given, and the next moment several persons were seen coming round the corner.

Foremost amongst these was Mr. Warburton, and with him were Lady Starkey, Lady Talmash, Mrs. Stanley, and Rose.

At the same time another party, consist-

ing chiefly of servants, could be seen coming from the back of the premises.

As it was clear that Darcy would be stopped if he attempted flight, he remained stationary.

In another moment the squire came up, and was immediately followed by the ladies.

"So I find you really are here, Captain Darcy," said Mr. Warburton. "I could scarcely believe the statement when I first heard it. I could not conceive it possible that you would make such an attempt."

"I am very sorry to have caused you any alarm, Mr. Warburton," said Darcy; "but I really did not mean it. Mr. Stanley Brereton will explain matters to you."

"Yes, yes, Captain Darcy has told me all, and you shall hear it presently," replied Stanley. "Meanwhile," he added in a lower tone, "I think you had better not detain him."

"Oh! if you are satisfied, I have nothing to say," remarked the squire.

"But what is the meaning of this clandestine visit?" cried Lady Starkey. "Surely we are entitled to some information!"

"Everything is known to Mr. Stanley

Brereton," replied Darcy. "He can tell you all."

"If he will give us a promise to that effect, we shall be quite satisfied," said Lady Talmash.

"I will, I will," replied Stanley. "Pray do not detain Captain Darcy."

"You are quite free to depart, sir," said the squire to Darcy. "I don't know what has happened——"

"But I am sure you will be satisfied with the explanation you will receive."

"Yes, you need have no uneasiness," said Stanley. "All is now arranged."

On this assurance, Darcy bowed to those near him, and quickly took his departure.

## XXV.

### THE INTERVIEW BETWEEN STANLEY AND MILDRED.

Mildred did not suffer so much as might have been anticipated from the excitement of Darcy's visit.

Not till next morning did she learn that a meeting had taken place between him and Stanley; nor did she hear what passed at it till her father came to see her.

But the cautious squire did not tell her that a duel would ensue. Stanley felt bound to inform Mr. Warburton of his intentions but no one else, except his mother—and he almost regretted taking her into his confidence, for she could scarcely conceal her uneasiness.

Naturally, Darcy's visit excited a great sensation at Beaucliffe. That he would come again none of the servants seemed to doubt. Each night they expected a fresh alarm. But nothing occurred.

As Stanley looked upon the duel in which he had engaged with Darcy, as a mortal combat, and felt confident that his antagonist would try to shoot him, he deemed it right to make all needful arrangements in case of his own death.

Accordingly, he left all his property to his mother, to whom he gave certain directions, and having mentioned the matter to her, he felt quite easy.

He had a good deal of confidential conversation with Lady Starkey and Lady Talmash, and, though no allusion was made to the duel, it was evident they suspected his design. Perhaps the squire might have given them a hint.

On the fourth morning after Darcy's secret visit, as Stanley was sitting at a writing-table in the library at Beaucliffe, occupied by the draft of the will, which had just been sent in by his solicitor, Sister Aline entered the room.

Without any ceremony, she took a seat

on the opposite side of the table, and, looking at him inquiringly for a moment, said:

"I see that you are reading—your will. And I know why you have just made it. You are about to fight a duel with Darcy, and wish to be prepared."

Stanley looked for a moment surprised, and then replied calmly:

"You have guessed aright; but I beg you will say nothing either about the will or the duel."

"I will not," she replied. "But, after your meeting with Darcy, everybody felt certain that a duel would ensue, and, as he is considered a dead shot, you are quite right to be prepared."

"He has a bad cause," rejoined Stanley; —"a doubly bad cause. I hope to avenge my uncle Sir Thomas Starkey's death, and my own dishonour."

"I trust you may," she rejoined, scarcely able to conceal her emotion. "Believing that this duel was inevitable, I have come to entreat you to see Mildred before you engage in it. She earnestly prays to see you."

"I cannot refuse her request. I will come

to her this evening. But our meeting must be very brief."

"I will tell her what you say," replied Sister Aline. "May I venture to inquire where the duel will take place?"

"At Dieppe," he replied, significantly.

"At Dieppe," she ejaculated, starting. "Fate then may have arranged it."

"Fate, I doubt not, has ordained his chastisement," rejoined Stanley, sternly. "I do not hesitate to declare to you, who are acquainted with Darcy's history, that I will avenge Sir Thomas Starkey — if I can."

"I applaud your resolution," she rejoined. "Darcy deserves no pity."

"And shall have none," rejoined Stanley. "Either he shall kill me or I will kill him, for it will be a duel to the death."

"Heaven will guard you," she rejoined. "Your cause is the right."

"That I feel," he replied. "And I have, therefore, no uneasiness."

Sister Aline then arose.

"I shall tell Mildred you will come to her this evening," she said.

"Be present at our interview, I pray you?" he said.

"Since you desire it I will," she replied, as she quitted the room.

Not without considerable misgiving did Stanley proceed to Mildred's room that evening.

Charlotte opened the door for him, and the penitent, who had Sister Aline with her, as had been previously arranged, arose on his entrance, and received him with a faint smile.

"It is very good of you to come to me," she said, motioning him to take a seat.

Though he felt deeply for her, Stanley preserved a stern demeanour.

"Since it may be our last earthly meeting," he replied, "I could not refuse your request."

"I am very, very sorry you are obliged to meet Darcy in mortal combat," she said. "But there is no possibility of arrangement, I suppose?"

"None," replied Stanley, in a decided tone.

"Your adversary is accounted a dead shot."

"I care not," he rejoined. "He whose cause is just need have no fear. I have none."

"I am glad to hear it," said Mildred. "Still I wish you were not obliged to meet him."

"It is useless to discuss that point," said Stanley, in a stern tone. "The meeting is fixed, and under no circumstances will be changed."

"My prayers will be entirely for you," said Mildred.

"You have suffered deep wrong," said Sister Aline, addressing Stanley, "and the Lord will assuredly avenge you."

"I place my trust in Heaven," he rejoined. "If I fall punishment will overtake him."

"Do you absolutely refuse him forgiveness?" said Mildred.

"Absolutely," he replied. "But do not delude yourself with any such notion. There will be no contrition on Darcy's part."

"I fear not," said Mildred; "and I cannot doubt that the affair will have a tragic and terrible end. Unquestionably you are in the position of the avenger, and as your cause is just I cannot doubt that Heaven will strengthen your arm. Go forth, then, without fear, for though your adversary is

the more skilful he will not have the same protection as yourself."

"He is doomed," said Sister Aline; "and what is more, deserves his fate."

"I will not spare him, depend upon it!" said Stanley, rising to depart. "Farewell!"

He did not hazard a glance at Mildred as he quitted the room, and, consequently, did not perceive that she had fainted.

The interview had been very painful to him and he was glad it was over.

Restoratives were immediately applied by Sister Aline and Charlotte, who was summoned to her assistance, and Mildred soon regained consciousness. But it was evident that she was severely shaken, and Sister Aline remained with her during the whole of a sleepless night.

Next day, she was not much better, but was soothed by converse with her father, who spent an hour by her couch.

## XXVI.

### PREPARATIONS FOR THE DUEL.

Accompanied by two friends, Mr. Wynn and Mr. Linton, who joined him in town, Stanley crossed from Newhaven to Dieppe, to keep his appointment with Darcy. He had allowed himself plenty of time, for the meeting was not to take place till the second day after his arrival. He took his friends with him to the Hôtel Royal, where he had previously engaged rooms, and was much pleased to learn from inquiries made immediately on his arrival, that the Comte de Clairvaux was in Dieppe at the time,—so he went immediately in quest of him, and found him at the Casino.

The comte was much pleased to see him,

and declared he should be happy to serve him in any way in his power.

On hearing that Stanley's object was to fight a duel with Darcy, he could not help expressing a hope that the young man might prove victorious.

"I had the greatest regard for your uncle, Sir Thomas Starkey, and have always felt that his death ought to be avenged. It gives me, therefore, the greatest satisfaction to feel that you have called Captain Darcy to account, and I will most readily act for you in any way you may desire ; but since you are already provided with seconds, you will only require me as a friend, and I shall be most happy to act in that capacity, and, perhaps, I may be of use."

"You will be of the greatest use, Monsieur le Comte," replied Stanley, "and I shall be exceedingly obliged by your assistance."

"Very likely you are not aware that Captain Darcy and his friends, Colonel Seymour and Captain Townley, have arrived, and are staying at the same hotel as yourself. Of course, until now, I was not aware of the object of their visit, though I rather suspected it."

"Allow me to mention, comte," said Stanley, "that I should like the meeting to take place on the exact spot where the former fatal duel occurred."

"There can be no difficulty about that," replied the comte. I know the precise place where my dear friend fell, and I never pass near it without thinking of him with a sigh. It is near the road to the Château d'Arques, and is marked out by an old oak. But I will find the coachman who drove Sir Thomas on that occasion, and engage him, so there shall be no mistake."

"I shall be greatly beholden to you," said Stanley. "I attach much importance to this slight circumstance."

"I don't think the circumstance is slight," replied the comte. "It will inspire you with thoughts proper to the occasion. Shall I engage Monsieur Martin, the surgeon who attended dear Sir Thomas at the former duel? I saw him yesterday."

"Engage him by all means, comte," replied Stanley.

"I trust you won't require his services," said the comte. "But it is proper to have a surgeon with you."

The foregoing conversation took place in front of the Hôtel Royal, and just at its close Darcy and his two friends made their appearance.

Colonel Seymour and Captain Townley were both tall and handsome, with a decidedly military bearing; and Darcy having pointed out Stanley to them, they formally saluted him as they passed.

Darcy did not enter the hotel with his friends, but signified that he should be glad to say a word to the comte, whereupon Stanley left them together.

"I fancy you have something to communicate to me, Monsieur le Comte," said Darcy. "Is it so?"

"I have merely to mention that the meeting between you and Mr. Stanley Brereton is to take place on the exact spot where the former duel occurred, on the day after to-morrow."

"At what hour?" asked Darcy.

"At eight in the morning, if that is not too early for you," replied the comte.

"The hour will suit me perfectly," replied Darcy.

"Will you lead the way to the place of rendezvous?"

"Certainly, if you desire it," replied Darcy.

"Then all is settled—so far as I can see," said the comte.

They then saluted each other ceremoniously, and separated.

On that day, all the persons who were so soon to meet in deadly conflict dined at the Casino, and in the public room, but at tables placed far apart.

As will naturally be expected, the Comte de Clairvaux dined with Stanley and his friends.

Both parties were very lively, and no one would have supposed from their manner that the principals had a mortal duel on hand.

Next morning Darcy walked forth at an early hour, and took his way down to the *plage*.

He had not gone far, when he heard quick steps behind him, and looking back, saw that he was followed by Sister Aline.

As it was impossible to avoid her, he stopped, and regarded her with a stern look.

"Do you wish to speak to me?" he said.

"I do," she replied. "I have come to bid you prepare. Your evil career is near its close."

"Do not suppose that your threats have the slightest effect upon me," he replied. "I am not to be frightened. If you desire to save Stanley Brereton, warn him, for I swear to Heaven if he places himself opposite me on Friday morning I will shoot him as I did his uncle, Sir Thomas Starkey."

"You persuade yourself so," she rejoined. "But you are mistaken. Stanley is destined to kill you, and his bullet will as surely be lodged in your breast as you now stand before me."

Darcy laughed scornfully.

"You try vainly to alarm me," he said. "If he keeps his appointment, as no doubt he will, for he is a brave man, nothing can save him."

"Indulge no false expectations," she rejoined. "Heaven will frustrate your design. Your wicked career is nearly ended. If you would not perish eternally, make your peace quickly above."

"I will listen no more to this frenzy," he said. "Let me pass!"

And he pushed her aside.

But as he cast a look behind, he trembled at her vindictive looks.

"That woman troubles me," he thought. "What can have brought her here?"

For a few moments his strong nerves were shaken, and he regarded the approaching meeting with dread. But this feeling passed off quickly, and he laughed at his own fears.

"This is superstitious folly," he mentally ejaculated. "Because this crazy woman has unexpectedly appeared on the scene, and threatened me, am I to be made uneasy? That would be to confess myself as weak as herself. No, let me keep my nerves firmly strung. Let me be prepared to act, as I did when I encountered Sir Thomas Starkey, and in a very few minutes Stanley will be lying at my feet, never to rise again. But if I give way to idle fears, my hand will shake when it should be steady, and I shall certainly miss my aim."

## XXVII.

### STANLEY'S MESSAGE TO MILDRED.

DEEMING it desirable to familiarise himself with the ground, Stanley, accompanied by his two friends and the Comte de Clairvaux, drove over, in the course of the day, to the place of meeting. He had engaged an open carriage, and was driven by Sir Thomas Starkey's coachman and attended by the comte's valet, Pierre.

As the morning was very fine, they all enjoyed the drive. They alighted near the old oak, and after carefully examining the ground, which Stanley regarded with deep interest, they ascended the mound which, it may be remembered, stood near the spot.

On the further side of this eminence they perceived a female figure, which Stanley and the comte at once recognised as Sister Aline, and they went to speak to her.

"I did not expect to find you here," said Stanley; "but I suppose you could not help coming."

"I have been praying for you," she replied; "and I am persuaded you will be successful to-morrow. Your cause is as good as your adversary's is bad."

"Mr. Brereton has got a dangerous antagonist," remarked the comte. "But if he will follow my advice he has nothing to fear. Aim high, and fire quick."

"It is my intention to fire as quickly as I can," said Stanley.

"Have your friends ever acted as seconds in a duel before?" asked the count.

"I think not," replied Stanley. "But I have no doubt they will carry me through satisfactorily."

"A great deal depends upon experience," said the count. "I must give them a few hints. With regard to yourself—If your hand is perfectly steady, raise your pistol as quickly as you can, and since your purpose is to kill, fire when you gain the

region of the heart. A second will make all the difference—remember that. In the former duel, it was promptitude that gave Darcy success."

"I fancied so," replied Stanley; "and I therefore resolved to be quick—and I have perfect reliance on myself."

"I am very glad to hear it," replied the count. "And now, excuse me for a few minutes, while I have a little talk with those gentlemen. I can see they are unaccustomed to these matters."

So saying, he went to the seconds, and explained some details to them, with which he felt sure they were unacquainted.

Meanwhile, Stanley remained with Sister Aline, and remarked:

"I am glad of this opportunity of saying a few words in private to you. If I should be unfortunate in this affair, I shall feel inexpressibly obliged if you will carry back some message to these dear to me. Pray see my dear mother, and tell her with what warmth of affection I thought of her. Bid a tender adieu to Rose, and pray her to think of me. Bid farewell, also, to Mr. Warburton, from whom I have experienced

so much kindness, and for whom I have the greatest regard."

He then paused for a short time before he proceeded, and his faltering voice betrayed his emotion.

"Should Mildred never behold me again, she will understand that her penitence has produced the greatest effect upon me. I fully believe in it, and entirely forgive her."

"Never was repentance more deep and sincere than hers," said Sister Aline; "and I feel convinced that her sins—great as they are—will be pardoned. Darcy is responsible for them. But I entreat you, address a few lines to the poor penitent, which I will convey. They will be the greatest comfort, and in return I will promise you her prayers."

"Your request shall be complied with," replied Stanley, with much emotion.

Just then, another open carriage, containing Darcy and his friends, arrived on the ground. Evidently they had come on the same errand as themselves.

Next moment the comte came up, and pointed them out.

"We had better hasten our departure, since they have come," he said.

"Decidedly," replied Stanley. "How will you get back to Dieppe?" he said to Sister Aline.

"I have a carriage close by," she replied. "It is yonder at the further side of the mound."

"Bear in mind," said Stanley, "that the meeting will take place to-morrow morning at eight o'clock punctually. You will confer the greatest favour possible upon me, if you will be upon the ground at the time, as I may possibly—though I trust I shall not—require your services. If you comply with my request, pray station yourself near this eminence!"

"Before eight o'clock to-morrow morning, I will be here," she rejoined.

Descending the further side of the mound, she entered the carriage waiting for her, and returned to Dieppe.

At the same time, Stanley, attended by his friends, went down the front of the little eminence, and bowing formally to Darcy and the two officers, who returned

their salutes just as stiffly, drove back to the *Etablissement des Bains*, where they passed the rest of the morning.

Again they dined at the Casino, and once more met Darcy and his friends.

## XXVIII.

### THE MEETING.

APPARENTLY, the hostile party were in tolerably good spirits, for they drank two or three bottles of champagne.

"Take my advice," said the comte to Stanley. "Don't touch champagne to-day."

At six o'clock next morning, a close carriage, containing only Sister Aline, left Dieppe, and took the road to the Château d'Arques, but only proceeded so far as the old oak, near to which the sister alighted, and after gazing for a short time on the spot which seemed to awaken very painful memories, she ascended the adjacent mound.

The morning was extremely fine, and the prospect beautiful, but she looked sad and

preoccupied, and noticed nothing but the scene of the former duel.

Looking toward it, she exclaimed:

"This day I trust thou wilt be avenged. Nay, I am assured of it. He who ventured to judge and punish others shall now be judged and punished in his turn. The hour of vengeance is, at length, arrived. Be present, if thou can'st—though unseen—and witness the defeat and chastisement of this wicked and deceitful man! May the bullet aimed against him be lodged deep in his breast—and when he falls, may he never rise again!"

As she concluded her half-frenzied invocation, she fancied that the shade of Sir Thomas Starkey was hovering near.

She then knelt down on the ground and prayed long and fervently.

An hour later three well-appointed carriages were standing in front of the Hôtel Royal.

The foremost was intended for the Comte de Clairvaux and M. Martin, the surgeon—the latter having already taken his place inside, while his assistant, with a bag filled with surgical instruments, had mounted by the side of the coachman.

The two other carriages were destined for those about to be actually engaged in the duel—it being intended that Darcy and his friends should proceed first to the ground.

The morning, as we have already mentioned, was exceedingly beautiful, so that if their errand had been an agreeable one, they might have anticipated a very pleasant drive.

Darcy and his friends had disappeared before Stanley and the others set out, but they were in no hurry as they knew the Comte de Clairvaux would arrange everything for them.

In half an hour all these persons had reached their destination.

Perceiving Sister Aline on the mound, Stanley went to say a few words to her, and was received with the assurance of victory.

"Listen to me," she said. "Since I have been here—on this mound—I have seen Sir Thomas."

"You fancy so," said Stanley, sceptically.

"I am certain of it," she rejoined. "He stood before me, as he lived. I then ques-

tioned him as to your likelihood of success, and he told me you would infallibly win."

"You have put fresh courage in my heart," said Stanley.

"Place yourself before your antagonist without fear," said Sister Aline. "Success is certain."

"I hope so," said Stanley. "But should these anticipations prove delusive—should I fall, come down to me!"

"I will," she replied.

Stanley then descended to his friends, feeling confident of success.

By this time the ground had been measured, and this necessary duty had been performed by Colonel Seymour and Mr. Wynn, assisted by the comte.

The order was then given that no one must remain on the ground, except the principals — the surgeon and his assistant being stationed as near the spot as was consistent with safety.

Before the comte retired, Colonel Seymour came up to him and asked whether any arrangement was possible between the parties, as he should be very happy to promote it.

"I do not think so, colonel," replied the

comte. "The feeling is very strong on the part of my friend, Mr. Stanley Brereton."

On applying to Mr. Wynn and Mr. Linton, the colonel found the opinion confirmed. These gentlemen declared their instructions were positive. No arrangement whatever could be made.

"Nothing, I regret to say, can be done," said Colonel Seymour to the comte. "The matter must be fought out."

"Then let the men be placed, colonel. Further delay is needless."

This was done, and the expectant combatants regarded each other sternly.

Pistol-cases were then produced, and a loaded weapon delivered to each person about to be engaged in the conflict.

When Stanley received his pistol, he experienced a sensation such as he had never felt before. He had an ardent desire for vengeance, but could not keep his hand quite steady, and was afraid that this nervous excitement, slight as it was, might interfere with his aim.

He felt his antagonist's eye fixed upon him, and kept his own eye on his antagonist.

Thus they remained for about half a minute, perfectly motionless, and with pistols lowered.

With the exception of Colonel Seymour, the seconds had now retired, but hitherto, the colonel had remained sufficiently near to superintend the proceedings.

He now drew back a few paces, and at the same moment the two combatants began slowly and steadily to raise their pistols.

As soon as he thought the weapons high enough, he clapped his hands, and both combatants fired, as nearly as possible at the same instant—though, perhaps, Stanley was first.

For a moment, it was impossible to say whether either was hit; but, as Colonel Seymour and Captain Townley moved towards Darcy, the latter placed his hand upon his breast, and the expression of his countenance showed that he was hurt.

"You won't continue the conflict, I suppose?" said the colonel.

"I cannot," replied Darcy, faintly. "I am dangerously hurt. I shan't be able to stand more than a minute longer."

"Here is Monsieur Martin," said the comte, bringing up the surgeon.

After assisting Darcy to take off his coat and waistcoat, the surgeon opened the shirt, which he found deeply stained with blood.

"It is a very bad wound," he said, as he examined it, "and you must prepare for the worst."

Darcy bore himself like a brave man at this formidable announcement, but he certainly would have fallen to the ground if some powerful restorative had not been applied.

His two seconds having come up, he leaned for support against Colonel Seymour's shoulder.

At the same moment, Sister Aline, who had descended from the mound, whence she had witnessed the conflict, came up, and asked if she could render him any religious service.

"Pray for me," he replied faintly.

At the same time the surgeon whispered in her ear:

"Understand he is mortally wounded."

She then knelt down at Darcy's feet, and

prayed fervently for him, concluding thus, "Deliver his soul, O Lord! May he rest in peace!"

Meanwhile, Captain Townley kept all persons, except the surgeon and his assistant, from approaching the dying man.

At the conclusion of Sister Aline's prayer, Darcy slightly raised his head, and said in a low voice to Colonel Seymour:

"Who is there standing beside me?"

"Where?" demanded the colonel. "There is no one except that devotee, who has now finished her prayer."

"There is a figure standing near me. Don't you perceive it?"

"No," replied the colonel, "it is mere fancy."

"It seems like Sir Thomas Starkey," said Darcy, awe-stricken.

"It *is* Sir Thomas Starkey," replied Sister Aline.

"Dismiss the notion from your mind, if you can," said the colonel. "Ah! he is gone!" he exclaimed, as a deep groan was heard, and he had nothing but an inert mass to sustain.

"Heaven pardon him," ejaculated Sister

Aline, seeing what had happened, and turning to depart.

Colonel Seymour laid the body gently on the ground, while the others gathered round it.

## XXIX.

GEORGETTE AGREES TO ACCOMPANY SISTER ALINE.

As Sister Aline walked quickly towards her carriage, which she had ordered to wait for her at a particular place, she saw her former attendant, Georgette, coming towards her, and as she had still a great regard for that devoted servant, she stopped to say a word to her.

"Do you know what has just happened, Georgette?"

"No, dearest sister," replied the other, making her a profound reverence. "I could see that somebody was killed, but could not tell who it was."

"It was Captain Darcy, the officer who

shot poor Sir Thomas Starkey, and has now got punished in his turn. I trust he has been able to make his peace with Heaven, for he had many heavy sins on his head. He was shot by Stanley Brereton, with whose beautiful young wife he had eloped, but would not stay with him, and is now a sincere penitent. Stanley Brereton is a nephew of Sir Thomas Starkey, so you see there is retributive justice in what has happened."

"I do—I do, dearest sister! How pleased I am that the wicked Darcy has been killed, and on the very spot where poor Sir Thomas fell. Oh! it is most satisfactory!"

"Hear me, Georgette," said the Sister. "I am now going back, as soon as I can, to England. Will you attend me?"

"Nothing I should like so much, dearest sister."

"For the present I am residing with the poor penitent lady I have just mentioned to you, and entirely devote myself to her. Formerly, I know, you were greatly attached to me, and I found it very hard to part with you."

"I am just as much attached to you now, dearest sister."

"Will it take you long to make your arrangements for the journey?"

"Only so long as I shall require to pack up my things. I am now at home."

"Your parents used to live at a small house not far from the Hôtel Royal."

"They live there still. I shall only need to drive there—to tell my mother I am going to England with Sister Aline—to pack my little valise—and all is ready."

"Come then!" said Sister Aline.

And she hastened to her carriage, closely attended by Georgette.

"I have my *malles* with me," she said. "So I need not go back to the hotel. Tell the coachman where your mother lives—bid him drive there at once, and then get in with me."

Georgette obeyed, gave all needful explanations to the coachman, and in a few minutes more was seated by Sister Aline, and on her way to Dieppe.

Georgette's mother was delighted with the arrangement just made, and assisted her daughter to pack up the scanty luggage she meant to take with her. When this was

prepared their valises were sent on board the packet, which fortunately did not start for Newhaven till noon. The house where Sister Aline stopped in the interim being close to the Hôtel Royal, as we have already intimated, she witnessed a very painful spectacle.

It was the body of a handsome and gallant gentleman, who had gone forth full of confidence and spirit a few hours before to fight a duel, and had been brought back with a mortal wound in his breast by a surgeon and his assistant.

## XXX.

### HOW THE TIDINGS OF DARCY'S FATE WERE RECEIVED.

Well knowing what anxiety would be felt on his account by his mother and Mr. Warburton, Stanley's first business on returning from the place of meeting to Dieppe was to send each a telegraphic message, stating the result of the duel.

Most welcome were these tidings, and the relief afforded by them incalculable.

Fear, by this time, had got the better of Mrs. Brereton, and feeling almost certain that Stanley would fall by the hand of his formidable adversary, she could not help imparting her uneasiness to Rose, who was almost equally alarmed.

It will be imagined, therefore, what they felt on learning that Stanley had been victorious, and the dreaded Darcy killed.

Now that the affair was decided, and so satisfactorily, Mrs. Brereton declared she had never had any doubt about it. It could not be otherwise. Darcy, the wrong-doer, would never be permitted to triumph, and was very properly punished. At the good news, the whole aspect of the place was changed, and joy and triumph succeeded to dejection and gloom.

"We will drive over to Beaucliffe, my dear, this afternoon," said Mrs. Brereton to Rose. "It is worth while fighting a duel if one can come off in this way."

Much the same sort of thing occurred at Beaucliffe.

By this time it had somehow or other oozed out that a meeting was about to take place between Stanley and Darcy, and everybody felt anxious for the former.

No sooner did the squire receive his telegram, than he hastened to impart it to Mildred.

"The duel has taken place!" he cried, as he entered the room.

"And what has happened?" she exclaimed, starting to her feet.

"Darcy is killed," replied her father. "Killed in precisely the same manner as Sir Thomas Starkey."

"Is it possible?" she rejoined. "He, the invincible—killed? But heaven had doomed him for his wickedness."

"Well, he will never more trouble any of us!" exclaimed the squire. "A great weight will now be taken from your breast."

"I feel it already," she replied. "While he lived I should never have been easy. I could not even have died in peace."

"Now he is gone," said her father, "I hope you will live. He had poisoned your existence, but his baneful influence is now over. Live!—live!"

"You give me hope," she rejoined. "And now pray leave me by myself, dearest father. I must thank Heaven for liberating me from this dreadful thraldom."

The worthy gentleman gazed at her for a moment or two with the utmost affection, and then left the room.

Kneeling down, Mildred prayed fervently.

Her prayers concluded, she arose with a

more cheerful expression of countenance than she had worn for some time.

On going down stairs, the squire repaired to the drawing-room, where he found Lady Starkey and Lady Talmash, and told them he had just received a telegram to say that Darcy had been killed in a duel, by Stanley, at Dieppe.

Both were surprised by the unexpected news, but they hailed it with the greatest satisfaction.

"Perhaps it is the best thing that could have happened," said Lady Starkey. "Darcy would have been sure to get into some fresh scrape."

"It is the best thing that could possibly have happened to Mildred," replied the squire. "She is now effectually liberated from him, and I am right glad of it."

Not long afterwards Mrs. Brereton and Rose made their appearance. Both of them exulted rather more in Darcy's death than Mr. Warburton thought proper, and he called them to order.

"Be charitable," he said.

"I cannot be charitable to such a man," rejoined Mrs. Brereton. "Nor does he

appear to have been so wonderful a shot as supposed. When brought to the trial he did not prove a match for Stanley. His crimes, no doubt, weighed down his hand. At any rate, I am very glad he is gone."

"No doubt he richly deserved his fate," said Lady Talmash. "I certainly don't regret him."

"Nor I," said Lady Starkey. "He chose to interfere with my affairs without consulting me, and I certainly felt no gratitude for the service he thought he had rendered me. He had his good points."

"I failed to discover them," said Lady Talmash. "To gratify his passion, he unhesitatingly destroyed the happiness of this family, and has been rightly punished."

"That cannot be denied," said the squire, "and I rejoice that he can do no more mischief."

Next morning Mildred received a letter from Sister Aline, giving her some details of Darcy's death, which she read with much emotion, but they did not produce any serious effect upon her.

On the contrary, she seemed greatly relieved. All her father's affection had returned. He spent part of the evening

alone with her and listened to her prayers, which afforded him much consolation; sat with her again in the morning and noticed, with much satisfaction, that some improvement had taken place in her looks.

No telegram respecting the duel had been sent her, but next morning's post brought her a letter from Stanley that gave her inexpressible comfort.

It was written before he left Dieppe, and far kinder in tone than anything she had received from him since their separation. Thus it ran:

"I scarcely expected to write to you again, for I did not believe I should survive the duel in which I have just been engaged. But I think I may rightly assume that my cause was just, since my adversary, who was accounted a dead shot, has succumbed while I have escaped unhurt.

"After this result, I am bound to manifest my gratitude to Heaven for my preservation, and I do so by sending you my entire forgiveness.

"May Heaven bless you!"

Mildred showed this letter to her father, and it touched him deeply.

"A reconciliation seems possible, after all," he said.

"Never," replied Mildred. "To that I would never consent, whatever Stanley might do. No, I was anxious to obtain his forgiveness, because it would afford me the greatest consolation, but I never for a moment supposed he would take me back again—nor do I desire it. For what I have done I must suffer. I shall continue the penitent life I have adopted—in which I shall follow the good example set me by Sister Aline. I must not seek a religious retreat—I may not become a member of a sisterhood—but I shall practice my devotions, and perform penance, as I have done of late, and shall never return to the world."

The last words were uttered with a solemnity that left her father little doubt as to her determination being fixed. Nevertheless, he said:

"I sincerely hope you may change your resolution."

"No," she replied, "it is unalterable. I am vowed to Heaven. But for you, dearest father, I would retire to a convent and never emerge from it."

"No, do not leave me, I entreat you!" he said, in an imploring voice. "Remain with me to the last. Everything shall be done to meet your wishes here, and if this part of the house is not sufficiently private for you it shall be made more so."

"I have everything I require," she replied. "The remainder of my life (which will not, probably, be very long) will be passed in repentance. I look at myself with astonishment and horror and marvel that I can have given so much time to folly."

"Well, don't disquiet yourself, my dear," said the squire. "Till this detestable Darcy appeared, your conduct was in every way satisfactory to me. In fact, you were more admired than any other girl in the county."

"As an equestrian, perhaps, papa!"

"More admired altogether," replied Mr. Warburton. "At that time I was very proud of you—and with good reason."

Just then, to their great surprise, Stanley came into the room.

## XXXI.

### STANLEY BIDS MILDRED NOT DESPAIR.

STANLEY had only just returned, and learning that Mr. Warburton was in his daughter's room, hastened thither.

On beholding him, Mildred uttered a slight cry, and springing forward, threw her arms round his neck, though next moment, she drew back, and blamed herself for yielding to the impulse. But Stanley raised no objection, nor did her father.

"Heaven be praised! we see you back again—and victorious!" she exclaimed.

"Ay, victorious," added the squire.

"Yes, I never expected to come back," said Stanley, "but my success proves that

when a man has a good cause he need never despair. I was resolved to punish this evil doer—if I could—and I have succeeded."

"You have indeed!" said Mildred; "succeeded most wonderfully."

"I heartily rejoice at your triumphant success," said the squire. "Though I must confess I had great misgivings as to the result of the meeting, I did not attempt to hold you back, because I thought you ought to punish him, or, at all events, try to do so. But as things have turned out, I am truly glad that you went. Nothing but Darcy's death could have satisfied me."

"My feelings must not be mistaken," said Mildred. "I have no pity whatever for Darcy. I can have none. My life has been destroyed by him. He had no real love for me, but had vowed to take me from my husband, and succeeded in his infamous design. I fled with him, but scarcely was the fatal step taken, than I bitterly repented. Then began the punishment, which I have never ceased to feel. Regarding my destroyer with loathing, I felt it would be intolerable torture to

remain with him. So I broke my bonds, and took refuge in my dear father's house."

"There is nothing to disturb the quietude of your life now," said Mr. Warburton.

"I am perfectly convinced of the sincerity of your penitence," said Stanley.

"Alas, alas! no penitence can wipe out my disgrace, and I must endure it to the end."

"Make yourself easy in one respect," said Stanley, with deep feeling; "you shall suffer no annoyance of any kind from me. I have too much respect and regard for your excellent father to do anything that might give him the slightest pain, and I promise you that no steps shall be taken of which he does not entirely approve."

"It is far more than I deserve," she replied, with a grateful look.

"You have always behaved with true filial affection to me," said Mr. Warburton, taking his hand, and pressing it warmly," and I thank you for my daughter and myself. In her present feeble state of health, I am anxious she should be disturbed as little as possible, and the very great consideration you show her in this

respect commands my deepest gratitude. You will have the opportunity of observing the sincerity of her repentance, and will judge how far she merits your kindness."

"I cannot for a moment doubt her sincerity," said Stanley, with great earnestness.

"I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the opinion you express of me," rejoined Mildred. "It affords me the greatest consolation. I shall now die happy."

"But I trust you may now speedily recover," said Stanley. "You must live for your father's sake."

"Yes, follow that excellent advice," said the squire, brushing his eyes. "I should be miserable without you, so you must get well again, as soon as you can—and there really is nothing now to prevent you."

"I never could have got well while Darcy lived—that is certain," she replied. "Perhaps I may now."

"I hope you may," said Stanley.

"Do you really?" she cried, looking at him.

"Undoubtedly," he replied.

"Then I will—if I can," she rejoined.

Mr. Warburton listened anxiously to what passed between them, and seemed much pleased.

"The prospect altogether seems brighter to-day," he remarked. "The dark clouds that have hung about us so long seem passing off."

"I sincerely hope so," said Stanley. "Nothing would rejoice me more than that Beaucliffe should become again the pleasant house it used to be."

"Since the main difficulty has been removed, there seems nothing to prevent it," said the squire, cheerfully. "Many things occur to me now which I should not have thought of while Darcy lived. But it is too soon to mention them. Nothing can now be decided."

"Your trials, I trust, are nearly at an end," said Stanley to Mildred; "and the remainder of your life may be happy."

Mildred made rather a sad response to this cheerful wish.

"I doubt whether much more life is before me," she said.

"Don't despair," replied Stanley.

"No, don't despair!" added her father. "See how much better things have turned

out than we could possibly have expected."

"Despondency will sometimes get the better of me," said Mildred; "but only for a moment or two, and it is now gone. I am truly thankful for what has taken place, and long to express my gratitude to Heaven."

"Then we will afford you an opportunity of doing so," said Stanley, preparing to depart.

"Is it too much to ask you to come and see me to-morrow?" she said.

"I should have come whether you had asked me or not," he replied.

She thanked him by a look, and he followed Mr. Warburton, who had just gone out of the room.

On proceeding to the drawing-room with the squire, Stanley met with an extraordinary reception from the ladies.

No sooner did he make his appearance than they all clapped their hands, and gathering round him gave him an almost embarrassing welcome.

"Why, you have become quite a hero," cried Lady Starkey.

"Everybody, but myself, thought you would be killed," cried his mother, embracing him.

"I didn't suppose everybody knew I was about to fight a duel," he remarked.

"Oh, yes, somehow or other, we all found it out," said Rose. "I own I felt dreadfully frightened, and am uncommonly glad to see you back."

"I hope you won't engage in another duel," said Lady Talmash. "You may not always be equally lucky."

"Depend upon it I won't if I can help it," said Stanley.

The squire now thought it time to interpose.

"You are all treating this matter as a joke," he said, "whereas it's a very serious business."

"We know that quite well," replied Lady Talmash. "But we feel so pleased that we can't look serious."

"Well, I only hope it's the last time I shall be engaged in a mortal quarrel," said Stanley, "especially with a man accounted a dead shot. I thought all was over with me."

"No wonder," said the squire. "It must

require some nerve to stand firm when the pistol of an infallible marksman is pointed against you."

"Having just had such experience, I must declare that it does," replied Stanley; "but at the same time I don't think my own nerve forsook me at the critical moment."

"It is clear it did not," observed Lady Starkey. "I sincerely hope this is the last duel you may ever fight. Good fortune may not always attend you, as it did not always attend Darcy. Next time you may be unlucky, like him."

"I am quite content with what I have done," said Stanley. "I won't make another experiment, if I can help it. Before dismissing the subject, let me mention that my adversary's seconds behaved remarkably well, at least I thought so; while Sister Aline, who was present at the time, proved a great comfort to Darcy in his last moments."

"Did he live very long after he was hit?" inquired Lady Starkey.

"No," replied Stanley; "but it is to be hoped that he lived long enough to make his peace with Heaven. Though mortally

hurt, he did not fall immediately, and Sister Aline was speedily with him."

"She seems to have behaved very well to him," remarked Mrs. Brereton.

"She behaved admirably," replied Stanley. "That I can testify."

## XXXII.

### SISTER ALINE DELIVERS DARCY'S DYING MESSAGE TO MILDRED.

MILDRED had been much gratified by her interview with Stanley—and no wonder! for it almost seemed as if a reconciliation had taken place between them.

The interest he had displayed in her had been far greater than she had reason to expect, and she recalled his every word, and dwelt upon them with delight.

No reproaches had been uttered, but on the contrary he had sought to soothe and comfort her, and she felt most grateful for the kindness he had displayed.

In the fervent prayers she subsequently addressed to Heaven, his name was fore-

most, and she invoked blessings on his head.

Later on in the day Sister Aline returned, and was warmly welcomed. Georgette accompanied her, but was left in the adjoining chamber.

"I have heard all that has happened," said Mildred to her friend; "and am well pleased you were able to attend Darcy at the last. Do you believe his repentance was sincere?"

"I hope so—but can hardly tell," replied the sister.

"He sent a dying message to you, which I promised to deliver."

"Indeed! what is it?" asked Mildred.

"He confessed he had done you great wrong," replied the sister. "I never loved her so passionately as I feigned," he said, "and took her away from her husband to mortify him."

"Was that his motive?" asked Mildred.

"That was the motive he avowed," replied the sister. "I did not love her," he said, "and though I sought to induce her to come back to me after her flight, I should soon have tired of her had she complied."

"I would have died rather than return to him," said Mildred.

"The attempt was solely made to provoke your husband, for whom he had conceived a strange aversion," replied Sister Aline. "He confessed that he intended to kill him in the duel, and fully expected to do so. His failure proves that the Evil One, who had thus far lent him aid, had now abandoned him, and left him to his fate. However, he may be pardoned, since he deeply regretted what he had done."

"Stanley must learn this," said Mildred. "He will then understand the person with whom he has had to deal."

"He shall," replied Sister Aline. "It will likewise prove that you have been the victim of a diabolical design."

"The chief feeling by which Darcy was governed seems to have been malice," said Mildred. "I will endeavour to forgive him, but it will be hard to do so. Had I been weak enough to yield to his solicitations, when he came here to lure me back again, what would have been my fate?"

"Heaven guarded you. Your good resolutions were strengthened."

"I saw through his perfidious arts," said

Mildred. "But I have been comforted by an interview with Stanley, whom I have just seen. From his manner he does not seem to have lost all affection for me. He was very kind, and said not one harsh word."

"Darcy's death, no doubt, has produced a great effect upon him. I felt sure it would."

"My father was present during the whole of the interview," remarked Mildred, "and seemed much moved by it. It is impossible that any one could have been more considerate than Stanley."

"I am rejoiced to hear it. Whatever may come of it, it cannot fail to have a beneficial effect upon you."

"It may prolong my life," replied Mildred. "Already I feel better. Had Stanley treated me as he might, with coldness and contempt, I should have sunk. But he has raised me in my own esteem, and I may possibly recover."

"Heaven grant you may," said Sister Aline. "But I do not feel certain your recovery would be agreeable to all the ladies now in this house."

"I cannot die to please them," said Mildred.

"I do not like to indulge worldly thoughts," said Sister Aline; "but some of them will assuredly oppose your return to your former position."

"Even if it should be offered me, I do not intend to resume my former position," said Mildred.

"As yet you cannot tell," said Sister Aline. "Darcy's death seems to have wrought a wonderful change in your husband's feelings, and from your description of his conduct towards you it appears highly probable that a reconciliation will take place. It will certainly be promoted by your father."

"But I should hesitate," said Mildred.

"Why hesitate?" rejoined the other. "If you have any conscientious scruples, give them due weight, but I see occasion for none. Leave the arrangement of the affair to your father. But pray do not offer any needless opposition! You have everything in your favour. You are here, on the spot. You have not to be brought back. All may be quickly settled."

"I must not indulge in these thoughts," said Mildred.

"Wherefore not?" rejoined Sister Aline. "It seems to me that they naturally arise from the present position of affairs. Depend upon it, their speedy consideration will be forced upon you, so you may as well make up your mind at once."

"I cannot! I cannot!" replied Mildred. "I am surprised you should recommend such a course to me."

"Circumstances, I repeat, have totally changed, and you will have to adapt yourself to them, and it seems to me that you can do so without difficulty. But here comes your father," she added, as Mr. Warburton entered the room, and respectfully saluted her.

"I heard you had returned and came to see you. You may be of great use to us at this juncture."

"I shall be happy to aid you in any way, and I think I understand how you require my assistance," replied Sister Aline. "I have learnt with the greatest possible satisfaction, that a perfect reconciliation has just taken place between your daughter and her husband."

"I rejoice to say it is a perfect reconciliation," replied Mr. Warburton.

"The sole obstacle has been removed," said Sister Aline. "From Darcy's dying lips I learnt the truth. He deemed himself rightly punished, and confessed that the wicked design he carried into effect was prompted more by hatred of Stanley than passion for his wife."

"Well, he is gone to his account, and let us think of him no more," said the squire. "I hope Mildred may be able to banish him for ever from her recollection."

"I do not doubt it," said Sister Aline.

"I shall never think of him—save with detestation, and as the destroyer of my happiness," said Mildred.

"There is much happiness in store for you, I trust," said her father.

"Your penitence is sincere, and your husband has pardoned you," said Sister Aline.

"But will the world pardon me?" said Mildred.

"Perhaps not. But what matters the world, if your husband and your father support you?" said Sister Aline.

"As they certainly will," added Mr.

Warburton. "Do not distress yourself. All may will now be well—of that you may rest assured."

Another interruption was here offered by the entrance of Stanley himself, who seemed as much pleased to meet Sister Aline as the squire had previously been.

"Welcome back again!" he said to her. "I heard that you were here, and came to satisfy you that Mildred and I are now entirely reconciled. Are we not?" he added, appealing to his wife, who heartily assented.

"With his dying lips Darcy completely exculpated her," said Sister Aline," "and confessed he was in fault. Shall I repeat his words?"

"No," replied Stanley. "He has been punished, and that is enough. My desire is entirely to forget him."

"And nothing shall ever remind you of him," said Mildred. "Never again shall his name be mentioned by me."

"Nor by me," added the squire.

"Let the past be buried in oblivion," said Sister Aline. "The future offers you happiness. Disturb it not by painful recollections."

Stanley then turned to Mr. Warburton and said:

"Henceforward our plans shall be entirely directed by you. Do you not agree in that?" he added to his wife.

"Entirely," she replied.

"You shall have my best advice," replied the old gentleman. "The only difficulty will be at first. But, with a little management all will be easily overcome."

"Overcome it will be since you undertake it, sir," said Sister Aline; "but not easily."

"Yes, easily, if we go the right way to work," replied Mr. Warburton, confidently.

"There will be considerable disappointment, I fear," said Sister Aline.

"No doubt!—no doubt!" returned the squire. "That must be anticipated. Expectations have been raised that can never be realised, and disappointment must naturally ensue. But I will make matters as smooth as I can."

"I am quite sure of that, sir," said Stanley, "and the course you propose is precisely that which will best please me."

"Pray do not let me brought forward at

first, dear papa," entreated Mildred. "I am not equal to the effort."

"Make yourself easy, my dear love," he rejoined. "You shall be placed in no difficulty that I can possibly avoid. It is somewhat unlucky that certain ladies are here at present—but they really cannot interfere, however much they may feel inclined to do so."

"Interfere they will—on that you may depend," said Stanley. "But their interference will produce little effect, if you stand firm."

"And rest assured I will," said the squire. "And now, since all is satisfactorily settled here, I will go down stairs to look after them."

"Heaven bless him!" exclaimed Sister Aline.

## XXXIII.

### LADY STARKEY'S ADVICE TO MR. WARBURTON.

Consternation prevailed among the ladies assembled at Beaucliffe.

Things had taken quite a different turn from what they expected. Instead of promoting their plans, Darcy's death seemed completely to have checked them. Stanley's intentions were not quite clear to them, but they had strong suspicions of the truth, since the squire had told them of the reconciliation, which they regarded in a very different light from what he did, and as a most unfortunate step both for Stanley and himself.

After some consultation on the matter,

which only served to increase their perplexity and annoyance, they resolved to defer its full consideration till next day.

Meantime, Lady Starkey undertook to have some private talk with Mr. Warburton, and clearly ascertain what was to be the new state of things, that they might know how to act.

This being decided upon, Mrs. Brereton returned with Rose, while Lady Talmash withdrew to her own room, with the intention of remaining there till summoned, leaving Lady Starkey alone in the drawing-room, where Mr. Warburton found her.

From the position she had taken in a retired part of the room, and from her grave looks, he immediately understood her object. But he was rather glad of the proffered tête-à-tête, and said so to her ladyship as he approached her :

"I have jnst come from Mildred's room, where I left Stanley. A complete reconciliation has taken place between them."

"So I expected, after what you had already told me. I think it a very unwise step for Stanley to take, and do not hesitate

to express my deep regret. It is equally unfortunate for you, sir, and I am surprised you should countenance it. Had you consulted me on the subject, I should have advised you most strongly against it."

"I had the strongest inducement to act as I did," replied Mr. Warburton. "Mildred's life, I believe, depended on my acquiescence."

"I can understand paternal tenderness," said Lady Starkey, "but cannot understand Stanley's strange conduct—certainly not appreciate it. Their reunion will not have the effect of restoring her to society; and I am therefore quite at a loss to comprehend what will be gained by it. Of necessity, she must continue the life of complete seclusion she is compelled to lead at present."

"There I entirely differ with your ladyship," rejoined the squire. "But should her friends cease to visit her, I am persuaded she won't regret it. She will have the support of her husband, and my support."

"Are you quite sure she will have her husband's support, sir?"

"Quite sure," replied Mr. Warburton. "He has pledged his word to me to that effect. Besides, nothing can be kinder than his conduct to her."

"I cannot understand it. He is governed by some unaccountable impulse. But it will not last, and what will happen when it ceases? Ask yourself that question, sir. Things will be worse than ever."

"I don't believe it," rejoined Mr. Warburton. "I am certain of my daughter's sincere repentance, and feel confident that her future conduct—should she be spared—will be such as to confirm Stanley's good opinion."

"I hope your notion may prove correct," said Lady Starkey. "But I have my doubts, and feel bound to express them. My opinion is likewise shared by Lady Talmash and Mrs. Brereton, both of whom think Stanley has made a very great mistake, and will find it out ere long. I think it right to give you this warning before the step is irrevocable, and I do so at the hazard of forfeiting your friendship, which I value much. Let the utmost kindness

and attention be shown to Mildred, but do not place her in a position certain to produce greater misery than she has yet endured."

"If I thought so, I might hesitate," replied the squire; "but I am confident your apprehensions are ill-founded. I have entire faith in her, and so has Stanley. Ah! here he is to speak for himself," he added, as the person in question entered the room.

"Lady Starkey has been severely censuring the step we have just taken in regard to Mildred, and declares we shall bitterly repent it."

"You will, I am certain, Stanley," she said. "Is it too late to retreat?"

"I have no intention of retreating," he replied. "I am quite satisfied with the explanation given by Mildred, whose conduct, though imprudent in the extreme, has not been as guilty as supposed. Confirmation has been given to Mildred's statement by Darcy's dying confession made to Sister Aline, in which he acquitted her of all but imprudence."

Lady Starkey looked incredulous.

"I cannot believe Mildred's statement, even supported by Sister Aline," she said.

"I firmly believe it," rejoined Stanley; "and I shall feel highly indignant if your ladyship persists in your doubts after this explanation."

"Which I can confirm in all particulars," added Mr. Warburton.

"I do not like to say so," rejoined Lady Starkey; "but I cannot but think that you have both been imposed upon."

"How?—imposed upon!" cried Mr. Warburton. "Your ladyship is strangely unwilling to believe the truth."

"It almost seems as if you had some motive for this incredulity," observed Stanley.

"My motive is unwillingness to see you made a dupe," she replied. "But let us postpone any further consideration of the matter till to-morrow, when your mother will be here, and when Lady Talmash can give you her opinion."

"I do not care for Lady Talmash's opinion," said Stanley. "I am fully satisfied, and neither her ladyship nor any one else will shake my conviction of the truth. However, I am quite willing to discuss the

subject, as you propose, to-morrow. But it must be for the last time."

Thereupon, he and the squire bowed to Lady Starkey, and went out through the open window into the garden.

END OF VOL. II.

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